Spring Gardening

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- **Gardens Are for Everyone** 4
    - For All Peoples 4
- **Joyful Kitchen Gardens** 6
    - Locating Your Vegetable Garden 6
    - Designing a Kitchen Garden 8
    - So Many Choices 9
        - The White House Kitchen Garden 9
    - Garden Companions 10
    - Flowers in the Vegetable Patch 10
- **Let's Get Nerdy about Dirt!** 12
    - Other Stuff in Soil 12
    - The Scoop on Compost 12
        - An Easier Way 13
    - Testing Your Soil 13
        - Six Soil Amendments 13
- **Tomatoes, America's Favorite Crop** 14
    - Tomato Types 14
    - Companions for Tomatoes 14
    - Favorite Varieties 15
        - Heirloom Tomatoes 15
    - Planting and Watering 16
    - Feeding and Supporting Plants 16
    - Harvest Time 16
        - Think Before You Pinch 16
    - Pests and Problems 17
        - Raid the Medicine Cabinet 17
- **Gardening in Raised Beds** 18
        - Sustainably Harvested Wood 18
    - Why Grow in Raised Beds 19
    - Building Materials 19
- **Inspirational Public Gardens** 20
    - U.S. Botanic Garden 20
    - Chicago Botanic Garden 21
        - National Bonsai and Penjing Museum 21
    - New York Botanical Garden 22
    - Missouri Botanical Garden 22
    - Topiary Garden Park 23
    - San Francisco Botanical Garden 24
    - Desert Botanical Garden 25
    - Lotusland 25
- **Landscaping with Succulents & Cacti** 26
    - Designing Desert Landscapes 26
    - Desert Plants for Most Climates 26
        - About Euphorbia 27
    - USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map 27
        - Desert Survivor 28
    - Desert Trees 28
    - Succulent Cuttings in Floral Design 29
    - Caring for Desert Plants 29
        - Right Plant, Right Pot 29
- **Herb Gardens to Love** 30
        - Perennial Herbs 30
    - Windowsill Herb Gardens 31
    - Formal Herb Gardens 32
    - Pointers for Growing Herbs 33
    - Herbs and Deer 33
        - Best Basil 33
- **Gardening & Deer** 34
    - Coping Mechanisms 35
    - Hence, the Fence 35
    - Deer-Resistant Planting 36
- **Healing Gardens** 38
    - Healing at Home 39
        - Fragrant Conifers 39
    - Accessibility in the Healing Garden 40
        - Tools to Look For 40
        - The No-Dig Garden 41
- **Community Gardens** 42
        - Eating Local 43
    - Starting a Community Garden 44
        - Here to Help 45
- **Serenity in the Shade** 46
    - Layering Plants in Shade 46
    - Paths and Destinations 46
        - The Truth about Ferns 47
    - Planting under Deciduous Trees 48
        - Hosta for Shade 48
        - Veggies for Shady Gardens 49
    - Gorgeous Side Yards 49

Lush & Luxuriant Moss 50
- Moss in Small Garden Spaces 51
  - More Possibilities 51

Artists & Gardens 52
- Frida Kahlo's Casa Azul and Courtyard Garden 52
- Claude Monet's Garden 53
  - Incorporating Art 53
- Georgia O'Keeffe's Garden 54
- Robert Dash's Madoo 55

Bringing Water into the Garden 56
- Ponds 56
  - Ponds for All Seasons 56
- Plants That Like Having "Wet Feet" 57
- Rills and Fountains 58
- Finding a Place in the Garden for Water 58
- Water Iris: Goddess of the Pond 60

Pollinator-Friendly Outdoor Spaces 62
- Planting for Pollinators 62
- Beyond Bugs 64
  - Artificial Nectar for Hummingbird Feeders 64
  - Pollinators Need More Than Plants 65
  - Good Bug? Bad Bug? 65

The Dirt on Gardens in Urban Spaces 66
- Going Vertical on Rooftops and Balconies 66
  - Growing Conditions in High-Rise Buildings 66
- Green Roofs 67
  - Pocket Prairies 67

Artful Containers 68
- In the Hottest Summer Sun 68
- Mostly Sunny, with Afternoon Shade 68
- In Shade to Partial Shade 70
- In Deeper Shade 71

Let It Rain! 72
- Passive Rainwater Harvesting 72
- Active Rainwater Harvesting 73
  - More Benefits 73

Plants Are the Best Housemates 74
- The Right Light 74
- Soil or Fortified Water? 75
- Food Plants for Indoor Gardens 75
- At Home with Houseplants 76
- Caring for Houseplants 77

An Interview with Monique Capanelli 78

Most Elegant Bloom 80
- Phalaenopsis 80
- Dendrobium 81
  - Tips for Getting Orchids to Rebloom 81
  - No Soil for Cattleya 82
- Cattleya 83
- Cymbidium 83
- Native Terrestrial Orchids 83
- Three Cheers for Technology 83

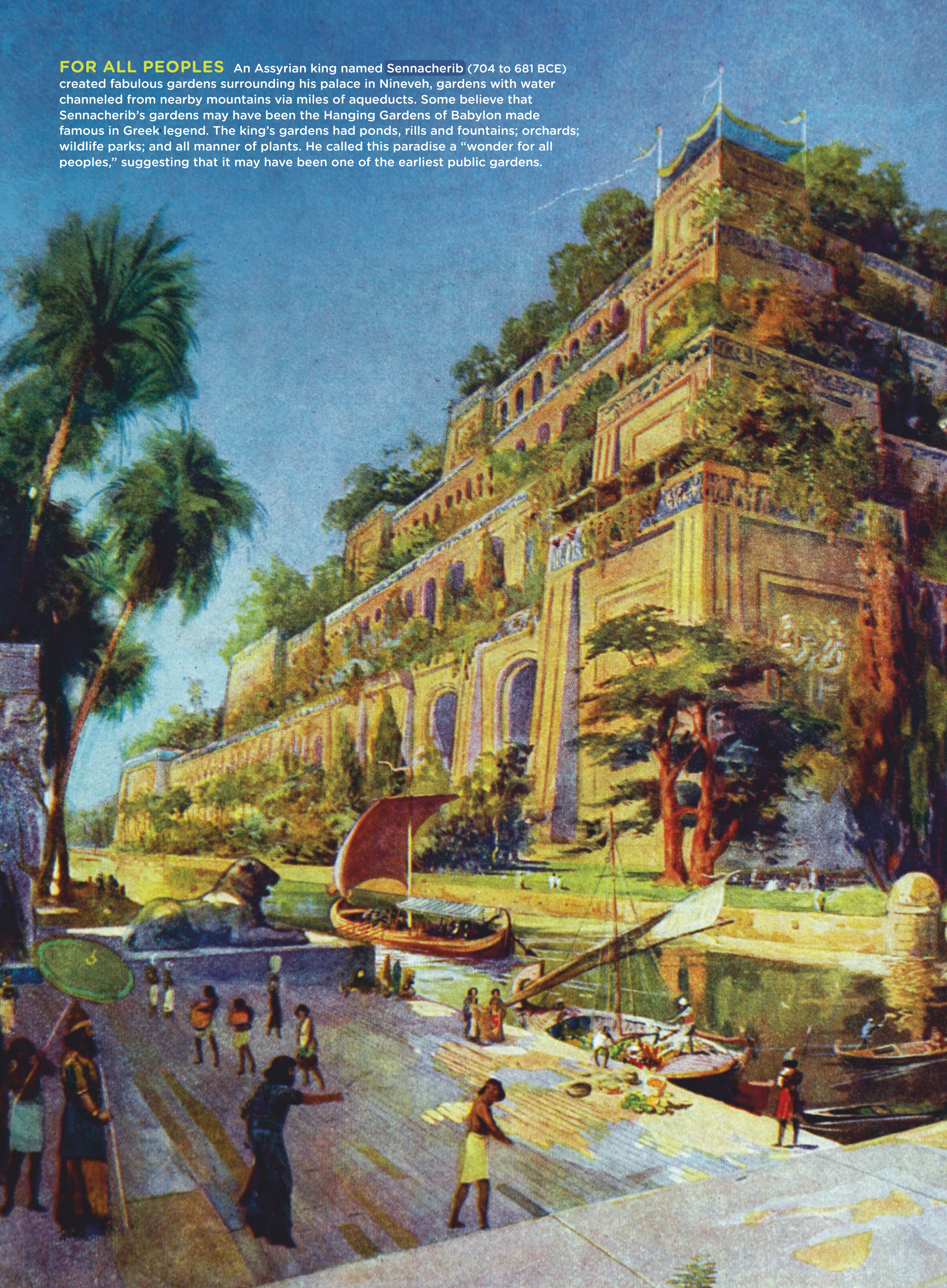
Cutting Gardens 84
- Plant Palettes and Textures 85
- Foraging for Fillers 85
- Planning and Plotting a Cutting Garden 86
  - Vines and Tendrils 86
- Maintenance 87
  - Cutting Flowers from Your Garden 87

Many-Colored Coleus 88
- Give Your Coleus Love 88
- Taking Cuttings for Next Year 89
- Coleus for Your Garden 89

Gardening with Kids 90
  - Growing Brains and Bodies 90
- To Get Kids Started in the Garden 91
- Garden Projects for Young Hands 91

Plants & People 94

FOR ALL PEOPLES An Assyrian king named Sennacherib (704 to 681 BCE) created fabulous gardens surrounding his palace in Nineveh, gardens with water channeled from nearby mountains via miles of aqueducts. Some believe that Sennacherib's gardens may have been the Hanging Gardens of Babylon made famous in Greek legend. The king's gardens had ponds, rills and fountains; orchards; wildlife parks; and all manner of plants. He called this paradise a "wonder for all peoples," suggesting that it may have been one of the earliest public gardens.



Gardens Are for Everyone…

…And anyone can garden.

No matter how much space you have, whether your thumbs are green or brown, gardening is therapeutic, life-affirming and practical. Come with us as we explore kitchen gardens to nurture the love of good food and gorgeous plantings. Check out community gardens where people grow things together, including a sense of belonging. Find tips and inspiration as you read about soil, composting and garden planning and maintenance. Pick up ideas as you wander with us through public gardens and gardens created by famous artists.

Yes, gardens are for everyone, but not all of us are born gardeners. Articles here include practical advice and possibilities that may not have occurred to you before on topics such as succulents, gardening with deer and vertical gardens. Learn about gardening in raised beds from both a design and a horticultural perspective. Delve into shady gardens, pollinator-friendly plants, rainwater collection and orchids. Read expert perspectives and advice from designer, plant artist and founder of the gallery Articulture Designs, Monique Capanelli.

Along with endless gifts of beauty and food, gardens give us exercise, self-confidence and hope for the future. Gardening is so many things to so many people. Let's start digging!

Joyful Kitchen Gardens

The flavor and crunch of straight-from-the-garden-to-the-grill sweet corn, butter dripping down your fingers—that is pure joy. The look on a three-year-old's face when she tastes her first homegrown strawberry—what could be more joyful? Growing your own food is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your family.

A ground-level kitchen garden.

Locating Your Vegetable Garden

Sunshine is even more important for vegetables than it is for humans—most need six to eight hours of bright sun per day to flourish (leafy greens may require a bit more shade time). Before popping plants in the ground, notice how sunlight and shadow move across the spot you've chosen for your vegetable garden throughout the day.

- A prime location for the garden will be near the house and a hose bib. Carrying heavy buckets of water across the yard can take all the joy out of gardening.
- Choose a spot out of the way of prevailing winds to protect your crops from damage.
- Fruit and vegetables need warmth and good drainage, away from areas that hold water and cool air.
- Plan a garden sized according to the amount of time that you can give to it.

Get creative, mix it up! Gardeners often make do with materials on hand—like this garden with different styles of beds, both raised and ground-level.

Make the most of the outdoor space you have. Raised beds can easily be planted in containers on an apartment terrace.

Designing a Kitchen Garden

Kitchen gardens that look fabulous and keep families fed don't happen without forethought. Here are a few fundamentals of kitchen garden design:

- Planting beds are best for expansive kitchen gardens, but you don't have to have a big suburban lot to grow veggies. Container gardens can be superproductive on balconies and patios if you can give them the daily attention they need.
- Beds can be raised or at ground level. Raised beds eliminate the need to add tilling amendments (extra nutrients or material for drainage) into existing soil and are easier to tend. On the other hand, with ground-level beds there's no building to do, and rearranging beds from year to year is not an overwhelming task.

Raised beds and gravel paths in a beautifully fenced garden

Mounded beds with straw-mulched paths

- Beds with paths on either side should be narrow enough for the gardener to reach from the edge to the middle. Beds up against a wall or fence should be narrow enough to reach from the edge to the back.
- Cleanly edged paths wide enough for a wheelbarrow keep the garden looking good and make harvest time easier. Paths of mown grass, paving stones, gravel or mulch look polished and add personality.

SUNFLOWER
TOMATO
GREEN BEAN
REEN BEAN

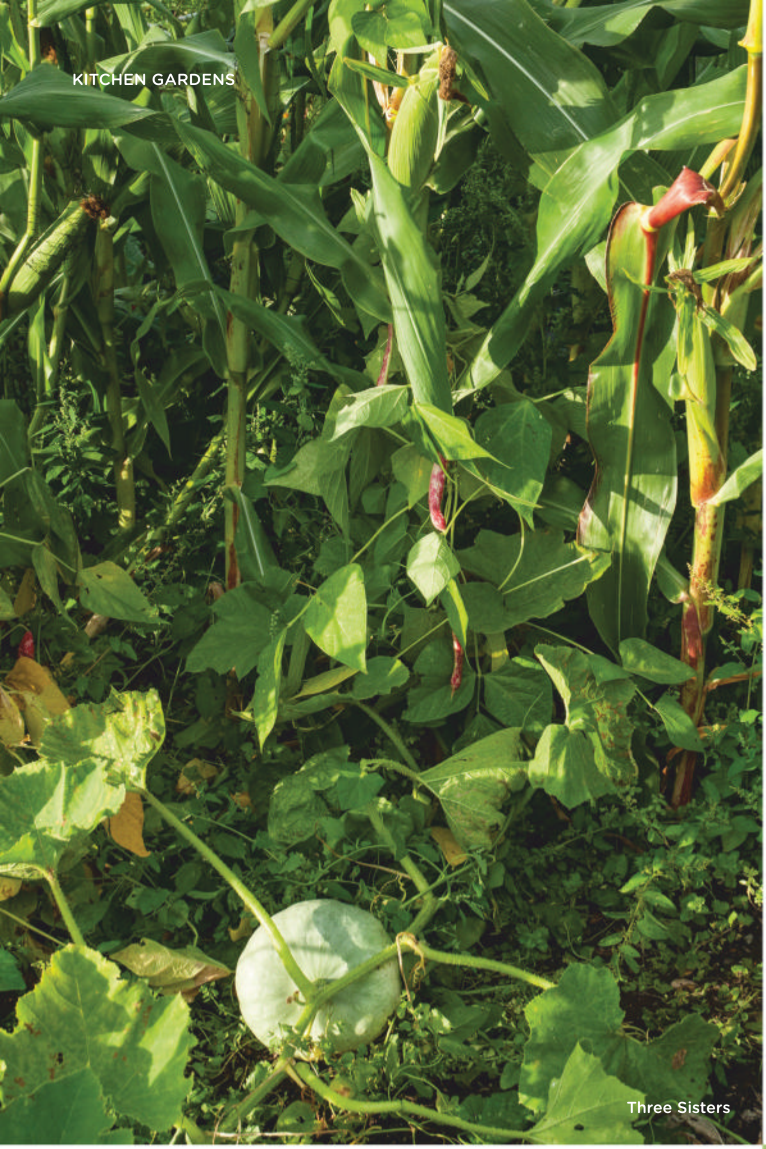
So Many Choices

In your local nursery you'll find racks of seed packets picturing perfect vegetables, rows and rows of seedlings waiting for you to transplant—how does anyone choose what to plant? Some gardeners begin with a shopping list, as if they were headed to the supermarket. Does your family eat salad with most meals? Go for leafy greens, tomatoes and cucumbers. Are you an avid cook? Look for the herbs and veggies in your favorite recipes. Labels on pots and the backs of seed packets reveal when each should be planted and the growing conditions it requires. Root vegetables like potatoes deserve a spot in almost any garden, whether they grow in containers or beds. Fast-growing legumes keep the kids interested in the garden's progress. In the end, however, take into account the amount of space and sunlight available, the type of soil and the time you'll need for maintaining and harvesting your garden.

Will you purchase seedlings or start your own?
When in doubt, read the seed pack to learn what and when seeds should be directly sown, like the spring peas below.

The White House Kitchen Garden

Growing food at the White House is a long-standing tradition, ever since President John Adams started it in 1797. In 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama led the creation of the White House Kitchen Garden. The 2,800-square-foot garden produces 2,000 pounds of food each year for the First Family, White House guests and charities that support folks in need. With a little help from schoolchildren, the National Park Service plants crops, works the garden and harvests its proceeds.



Three Sisters

Flowers in the Vegetable Patch

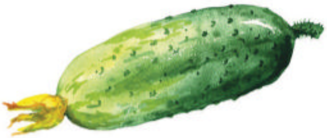
Flowers are a cheerful addition to any vegetable garden. Sweet peas, cosmos and zinnias are pollinator magnets that benefit vegetables and add flashes of color. Cosmos also lure green lacewings, pretty and helpful bugs that eat pests like aphids and thrips. Sweet alyssum, butterfly weed, calendula and geraniums all attract ladybugs, which feed on aphids, whiteflies, scales and mealybugs. Because cantaloupe, watermelon, cucumbers, pumpkins and squash need pollinators in order to bear fruit, they'll do their best surrounded by flowers.

Garden Companions

Indigenous Americans planted pole beans, squash and corn together in a combination known as Three Sisters. Squash thrives on the nitrogen fixed in the roots of pole beans. The broad squash leaves shade out weeds that might otherwise crowd the corn. Corn stalks support the vining growth of the beans. The beans, in turn, attract insects that feed on pests drawn to the corn. Three Sisters is an example of companion planting at its best.

Companion planting involves growing different types of plants close together because they benefit each other in some way. Guidance comes as much from tradition as science, and results vary a great deal.

Here are a few examples of plants that make great companions.

PLANTS	COMPANIONS	BENEFITS
Basil	Lettuce, tomatoes	Basil is believed to make tomatoes and lettuce even more delicious and may repel flies. It also attracts pollinating bees.
Beans	Beets, cabbage, cauliflower, corn, cucumbers, marigolds, potatoes, squash, strawberries	Potatoes and marigolds deter Mexican bean beetles. Nitrogen fixed by beans is a boon to many plants.
Broccoli	Chamomile, marigolds, oregano	Chamomile enhances flavor in broccoli. Marigolds drive away cabbage moths that prey on broccoli. Oregano repels many pests.
Carrots	Cabbage, chives, onions, radishes, rosemary, tomatoes	Onions and rosemary repel carrot flies and some other pests. Carrots loosen soil around tomato roots, and tomato plants shade carrots from hot sun.
Cucumber 	Beans, marigolds, oregano, radishes	Marigolds draw ladybugs, which gobble up aphids. Radishes are thought to repel cucumber beetles.
Melons	Corn, oregano, pumpkin, squash	Corn provides support for trailing melon plants. Oregano repels many pests.
Potatoes	Basil, beans, cabbage	Potatoes like the nitrogen fixed in soil by beans. Cabbage roots are shallow and potato roots are deep, so planting them together maximizes space.
Spinach	Cauliflower, celery, corn, strawberries	Corn shades spinach and spinach shades roots of corn. Cauliflower and spinach roots occupy different soil layers, so planting them together maximizes space. Spinach hides strawberries from hungry birds.

Let’s Get Nerdy about Dirt!

Great soil is the foundation for a great garden. It teems with life: one teaspoon of garden soil may contain billions of microorganisms that support the growth of plants. Bacteria and fungi turn trash (dead plant matter) into treasure (nutrients that living plants can use). Algae, nematodes, insects, earthworms and even mammals live, eat and poop in soil, enriching and aerating it.

Other Stuff in Soil

Besides life, soil contains minerals: sand, silt and clay. The amount of each determines the soil type and how well it drains. Soil with lots of clay holds moisture and doesn’t drain well. Sandy soil drains quickly. Soil with plenty of silt holds moisture and nutrients and releases them to plants more readily than clay. The best soil for most veggies is a mixture of all three, along with plenty of organic matter. It’s called loam.

The Scoop on Compost

Experts say the best soil for most vegetables is rich, rock-free dirt that drains readily. But what can you do if your garden soil is lacking? Compost, decayed organic matter, is a gardener’s best friend! Some gardeners till it into the soil before planting; others spread a two-inch layer on top and let beetles, earthworms and rain carry the goodness down into the earth. Most garden centers sell bagged compost, but you can create your own using yard clippings and kitchen scraps.

Garden compost consists of browns, greens and water. Browns are sticks and straw, cardboard and dead leaves. Greens include garden and lawn clippings, vegetable kitchen scraps and coffee grounds. Compost bins can be bought online or in retail shops, or you can make your own using a plastic bin with holes drilled into it. Before tossing any compost materials into a bin, mow over them or chop them up. As you layer on browns and greens, spray them with a garden hose (if the compost is not already damp). Grab a pitchfork and turn everything frequently to keep natural processes working. After a few months—sometimes a little longer—the lowest layer of the bin will yield lovely, dark compost for the garden.

AN EASIER WAY **Trench-composting** food and plant scraps is less energy-intensive than maintaining a compost bin. Just dig a 12- to 18-inch-deep hole and drop in chopped-up scraps. Backfill with at least eight inches of soil and let nature do its thing. Crushed eggshells feed the soil with calcium, helping to prevent blossom-end rot in tomatoes. Banana peels, rich in potassium, decompose quickly to perk up roses, fruit trees and, yes, tomatoes, too!

Testing Your Soil

You can test your soil type with your hands. Damp clay can be rolled up into a ball that stays together. Sandy soil is gritty, and silty soil feels powdery and smooth, like cornstarch. Another thing gardeners like to know about their soil is the pH level, which measures how acid or alkaline the soil is. The pH influences how plants take up nutrients. Soil pH is rated on a scale of 1 to 14; some plants flourish in soil with a low pH (acidic), while others need a high pH (alkaline). Most vegetables thrive in the middle, in the range of 6 to 7.

To learn about the pH and nutrients in their soil, gardeners can have a soil test done. Garden centers sell soil test kits, but you might get more accurate results by contacting a local university's agriculture department or your state's cooperative extension service. A gardener who understands the quality of the soil can either choose plants that will prosper in it or add amendments to change it.

Six Soil Amendments

Amendments are products added to garden beds over time. Here are six popular soil amendments.

compost

- decayed plant material
- adds nutrients and may lower pH

aged animal manure

- use sparingly to add nutrients
- avoid fresh manure as it can harm plants

coconut coir

- comes from coconut shells
- aids soil structure and drainage
- neutral pH

wood ash

- raises the pH of soil
- use only if soil test indicates it's needed

leaf mold

- decomposing leaves
- adds nutrients and aids soil structure
- may lower pH

sulfur

- lowers the pH of soil
- use only if soil test indicates it's needed

Tomatoes, America's Favorite Crop

Is there anything better than a tomato picked fresh from the garden on a hot summer day? How many foods are so delicious and good for you, too? Tomatoes are low in calories (18 for a small tomato) and high in nutrition (antioxidants, lycopene, vitamin C, potassium, vitamin K and folate). It's no wonder they are America's favorite garden crop.

Determinate plant

Indeterminate plants

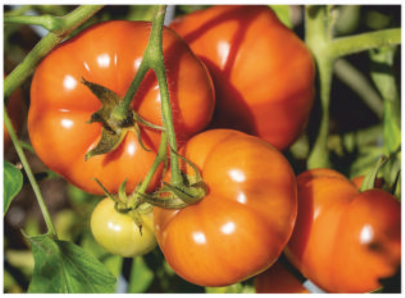
Tomato Types

Tomato plants fall into two categories: determinate and indeterminate. Determinate types become bushier plants (two to three feet tall) and tend to bear fruit a little earlier than indeterminate tomatoes. Determinate plants don't need to be staked—they are perfect for container gardens. Indeterminate (sometimes called vining) tomatoes fruit later and grow a bit larger, making some type of support necessary. The largest tomatoes grow on indeterminate plants.

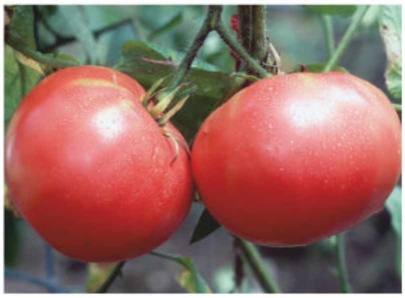
Companions for Tomatoes

Many experienced gardeners say that basil and tomatoes should always be planted together. Not only is basil thought to enhance tomato flavor, but it also deters some insects. Thyme is also believed to enhance tomato flavor and attract beneficial insects such as hoverflies. Carrots planted at the base of tomato plants improve soil structure, but the tomato may hog nutrients, making the carrots small. Mint, marigolds and cosmos help keep harmful bugs at bay while attracting pollinators.

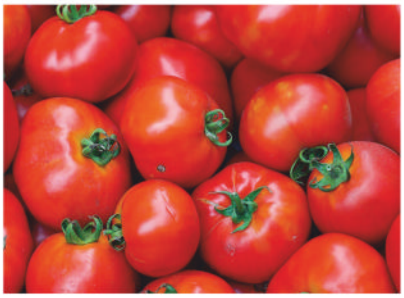
Favorite Varieties



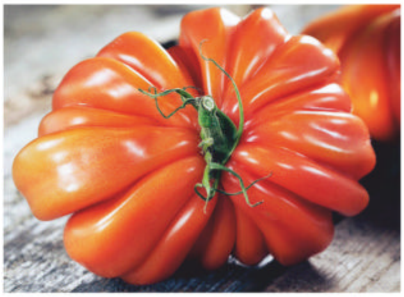
Bush Early Girl is a determinate tomato that produces early in the season and through the summer. Perfect for containers.



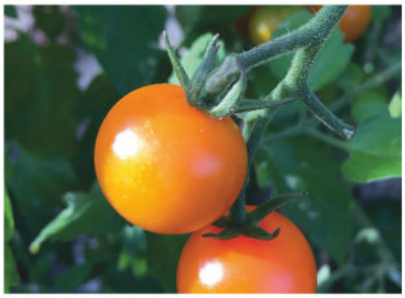
Brandywine is indeterminate and fruits late. It's an heirloom tomato with a nice, tangy flavor.



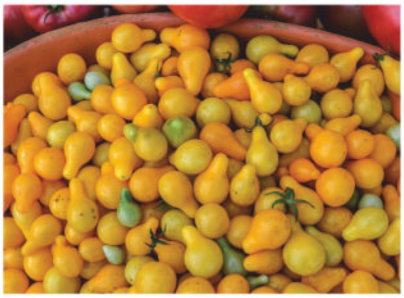
Iron Lady is a determinate, disease-resistant variety that produces early in the season. Great for containers.



The heirloom **Oxheart** produces big, meaty tomatoes with few seeds. It is indeterminate and produces late.



Sungold is an indeterminate, bright orange cherry tomato. It fruits early and is disease-resistant.



Yellow Pear is an indeterminate heirloom tomato that will produce bite-size fruit into the fall.

Heirloom Tomatoes

Big producers breed their tomatoes to ship without bruising and look fresh longer. These tomatoes are usually round and very red and have a mild flavor. Heirloom tomatoes come from seeds that have been passed down through generations of gardeners and small farmers. These growers bred their tomatoes for traits such as juiciness, sweetness or unusual color. Heirloom tomatoes tend to require a little more care because they are not as disease-resistant as modern hybrids, but the flavor makes them worth growing. Many seed companies sell heirloom varieties like Black Krim.

Planting and Watering

Gardeners growing tomatoes from seeds usually start them indoors. As heat-loving plants, tomato seedlings can be moved into the ground after the soil has warmed up. Plant deep, right up to the lowest leaves, because, unlike most plants, tomatoes form roots along the buried stem. You can even lay the stem down and bury it horizontally up to the lowest set of leaves. Water thoroughly after planting.

Newly planted tomato seedlings require some babysitting. The soil should not dry out completely until new growth appears. When new leaves do unfurl, that means the seedling's roots are established and it needs watering a bit less often. After about a month, cover the soil with mulch to help it retain moisture.

Harvest Time

Tomatoes are ripe when they develop whatever color they are supposed to have. You can stagger your tomato harvest by planting both determinate, early-producing plants and indeterminate, late-producing ones. Lots of savvy gardeners harvest tomatoes from early summer well into fall.

Feeding and Supporting Plants

Tomatoes are ravenous plants that grow best when fed every two to four weeks with tomato food, liquid seaweed or fish emulsion. Feed at soil level and water afterward. Once fruit appears, a one-inch layer of compost encourages ripening.

As indeterminate tomato plants grow, they need to be held off the ground by some type of support. Cages, stakes and trellises all do the job, as long as vines are tied on with soft twine—wire ties can cause damage by cutting into plant tissue. Another method of supporting indeterminate plants involves growing them up vertical strings attached from above.

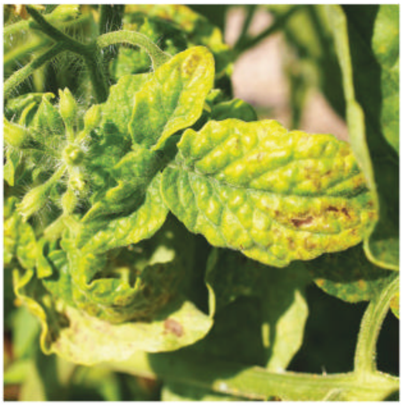
Think Before You Pinch

Most experts say that pruning indeterminate tomato plants to grow along a single stem produces larger (but fewer) fruits. Pinching improves air circulation, and that deters disease. Pinch out those side shoots with discrimination, though, because some leaves are needed for photosynthesis, which contributes to flavor, and, in hot climates, foliage can shade fruit to keep it from scalding.

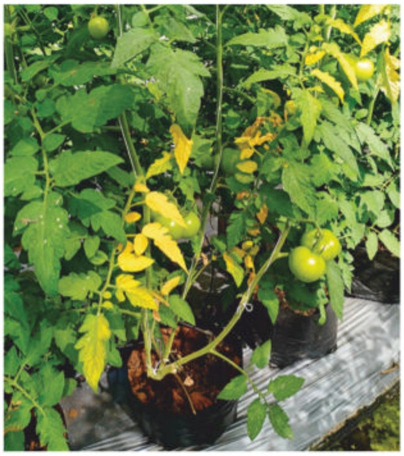
Pests and Problems

You've carefully chosen companions to keep your tomato plants content. You've watered faithfully and fed the plants every few weeks. They've grown tall, but—oh, no!—every flower that opens drops away, making juicy fruits a much-longed-for fantasy. No matter how diligently you care for your garden, plants can still have problems, but don't give up! Local agricultural extension offices can help you identify and treat plants to rescue the harvest.

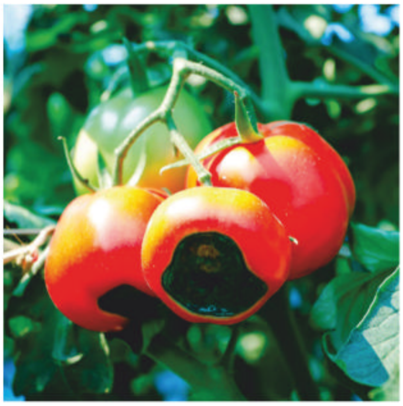
Plants that flower but **do not fruit or don't flower** at all may not be getting enough light or water.



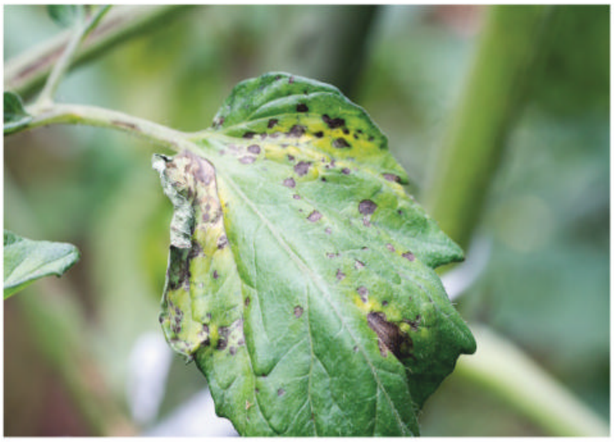
Curled-up leaves with yellow edges are a sign that whiteflies may have brought in a virus called, appropriately, **yellow leaf curl**.



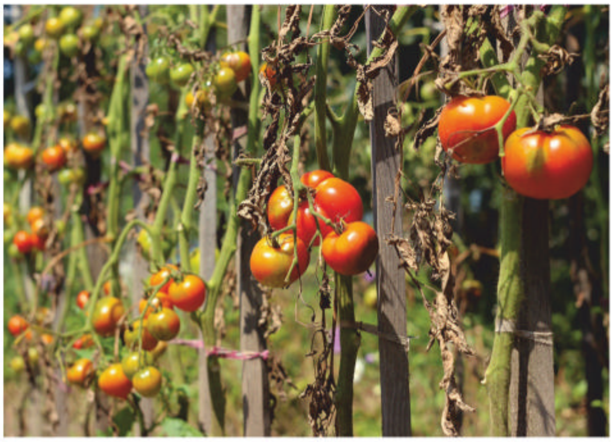
Leaves becoming yellow and wilted point to **fusarium wilt**, a fungal disease.



Dark, rotten undersides on fruit are a symptom of **blossom-end rot**, often caused by over- or under-watering. Prevent this by watering consistently.



Dark, circular spots on lower leaves are a sign of another fungal disease called **early tomato blight**.



If leaves develop moldy brown or gray spots on foliage and fruit, the plant may have a fungal disease known as **late tomato blight**.

RAID THE MEDICINE CABINET **Studies have shown that spraying plants with 250 to 500 milligrams of aspirin dissolved in four gallons of water supports tomato immune systems, producing healthier plants. Spray in the morning every three weeks throughout the growing season.**

Sustainably Harvested Wood

Black walnut, cedar, pine and cypress are all known for their resistance to rot, but not all are harvested in sustainable ways. To know that the lumber you buy is sustainably harvested from responsibly managed forests, look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) labels. If you would like to know more about what FSC labels mean, visit https://fsc.org/en/fsc-labels.

Gardening in Raised Beds

Soaring in popularity today, raised garden beds—that is, piles of soil and compost contained by planks or stone or . . . something else—are not a modern invention. In 18th-century Parisian markets, produce sellers took advantage of ample manure on city streets to build up fertile growing beds. Before that, medieval farmers lined beds with wattle (rods and stakes interlaced with twigs and branches), and long before that, pre-Inca farmers of South America grew crops in raised beds surrounded by canals. Even the engineers of Babylon's Hanging Gardens probably employed raised beds. Good ideas tend to stick around!

Why Grow in Raised Beds?

All the soil in a raised bed is introduced by the gardener, so there is far greater control over the dirt that plants grow in. That means that a garden can be successful almost anywhere. Is the soil in your area studded with limestone and clay? Raised beds solve the problem. Does your church want to establish a community garden in a paved parking lot? Raised beds are the answer. Another advantage is ease of use: gardeners can sit on the wall of an 18-inch-tall bed to pull weeds without bending over. Pests are easy to spot and harvest is easy on the back because plants grow at eye level. And raised beds can turn a rough-looking vegetable patch into a tidy and attractive kitchen garden!

Building Materials

Raised beds constructed of wood, stone or metal have the advantage of connecting the garden to the house in a visual way. Untreated wood, stone or metal that has not been treated with chemicals all are safe for growing food plants. Perhaps not quite as beautiful as wood or stone, fabric may be a more eco-friendly option. Some manufacturers use recycled plastic to make "grow bags" that drain well and offer the same practical benefits as raised beds. Smaller fabric containers can be emptied, tossed in the washing machine and folded up for storage at the end of the growing season.

Inspirational Public Gardens

"Lungs of the city"—that's what Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect behind New York's Central Park, designed the park to be. Olmstead wanted green spaces, forests and designed plantings to enable the city and its residents to *breathe*.

U.S. Botanic Garden, Washington, D.C.

The U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C., is the oldest continuously operating public garden in the country. The Conservatory is a destination in itself—28,944 square feet of fragrant and fascinating plant collections. The building, which dates to 1933, supports astounding exhibits and displays. There are medicinal plants, desert plants, orchids and roses, along with endangered plants, historically significant plants, carnivorous plants and more. The National Garden showcases plant life from around the nation and celebrates our First Ladies with the First Ladies Water Garden. Admission is free. The USBG website links you to a visitor's guide in ten languages. Be sure to check for open hours before you go.

www.usbg.gov/visit

Chicago Botanic Garden

The city of Glencoe has its own living museum in the Chicago Botanic Garden, occupying 385 acres, nine islands and six miles of lakeshore. Don't be intimidated by the size, though; there's a tram for visitors' convenience. The Chicago Botanic Garden delights the senses with its popular English Walled Garden—think of elfin thyme creeping between bricks, wisteria rambling over pergolas, water burbling in fountains. A 17-acre Japanese garden features islands and perfectly pruned trees, and an enabling garden demonstrates ways to make gardening accessible to everyone. There is a charge for admission and another for parking. Visit the website to check open hours and buy tickets.

www.chicagobotanic.org/visit

National Bonsai and Penjing Museum, Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C., has museums and public gardens in glorious abundance, among them the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum, located on the grounds of the U.S. National Arboretum. The practice of bonsai comes to us from 12th-century Japan, adapted from techniques developed centuries earlier in China. And before there was bonsai, there was *penjing*. Chinese penjing artists created miniature landscapes in pots using techniques that were freer, less restrained than later bonsai. Contemporary penjing includes not only miniaturized trees, but also rocks, figurines and often water.

The museum's collection began with a gift of 53 bonsai from Japan, in celebration of the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial. In the 1980s, another gift—penjing trees from U.S. artists—expanded the collection. Admission to the arboretum and the museum is free, and so is parking. Check the website for exhibitions and open hours.

www.bonsai-nbf.org/visit

New York Botanical Garden

On 250 acres of Bronx Park, the New York Botanical Garden grows over a million plants. Community leaders established the garden in 1891, referring to London's Royal Botanic Gardens as a model. One of the first buildings put up was the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, an Italian Renaissance–style glasshouse still in use today. The conservatory houses aquatic plants, rainforest tropicals, desert plants and, in the magnificent dome, palms, cycads and ferns from around the world.

Fifty acres of never-been-logged old-growth forest, with some trees more than 200 years old, offer a glimpse of what the area looked like long ago. The Peggy Rockefeller Rose Garden is an NYBG highlight, along with the two-and-a-half-acre rock garden designed in the 1930s and planted with alpine plants. A stunning 37-acre conifer collection is another "don't-miss."

Like most botanical gardens, NYBG engages in research and education. Scientists play leadership roles in conservation of plants and fungi across the planet. Check out the website for classes, FAQs and ask-an-expert services. Browse the website before visiting to learn about ticket prices, safety protocols, what's in bloom and special exhibitions.

www.nybg.org/visit/

Missouri Botanical Garden

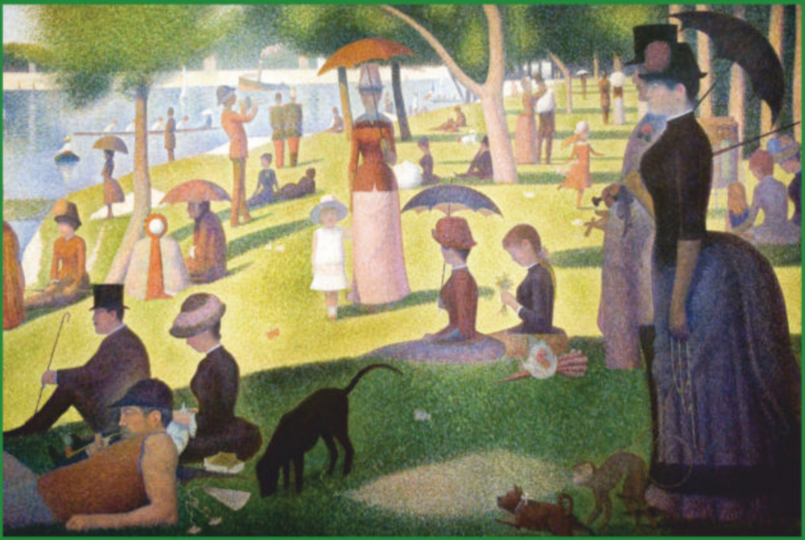
St. Louis

The stars of the Missouri Botanical Gardens are its three conservatories. The Climatron, a 24,000-square-foot geodesic dome, is filled with rare and exotic plants growing in a rainforest environment. The 1882 Linnean House features tropical plants—citrus and camellias. Shoenberg Temperate House showcases a series of themed gardens: a Moorish walled garden, plants of the Bible, plants from the island of Madagascar, bog plants and more. MBG's International Gardens take visitors on a plant tour of Germany, Japan, Turkey, United Kingdom and China. Visit the website for admission prices.

www.missouribotanicalgarden.org

Topiary Garden Park

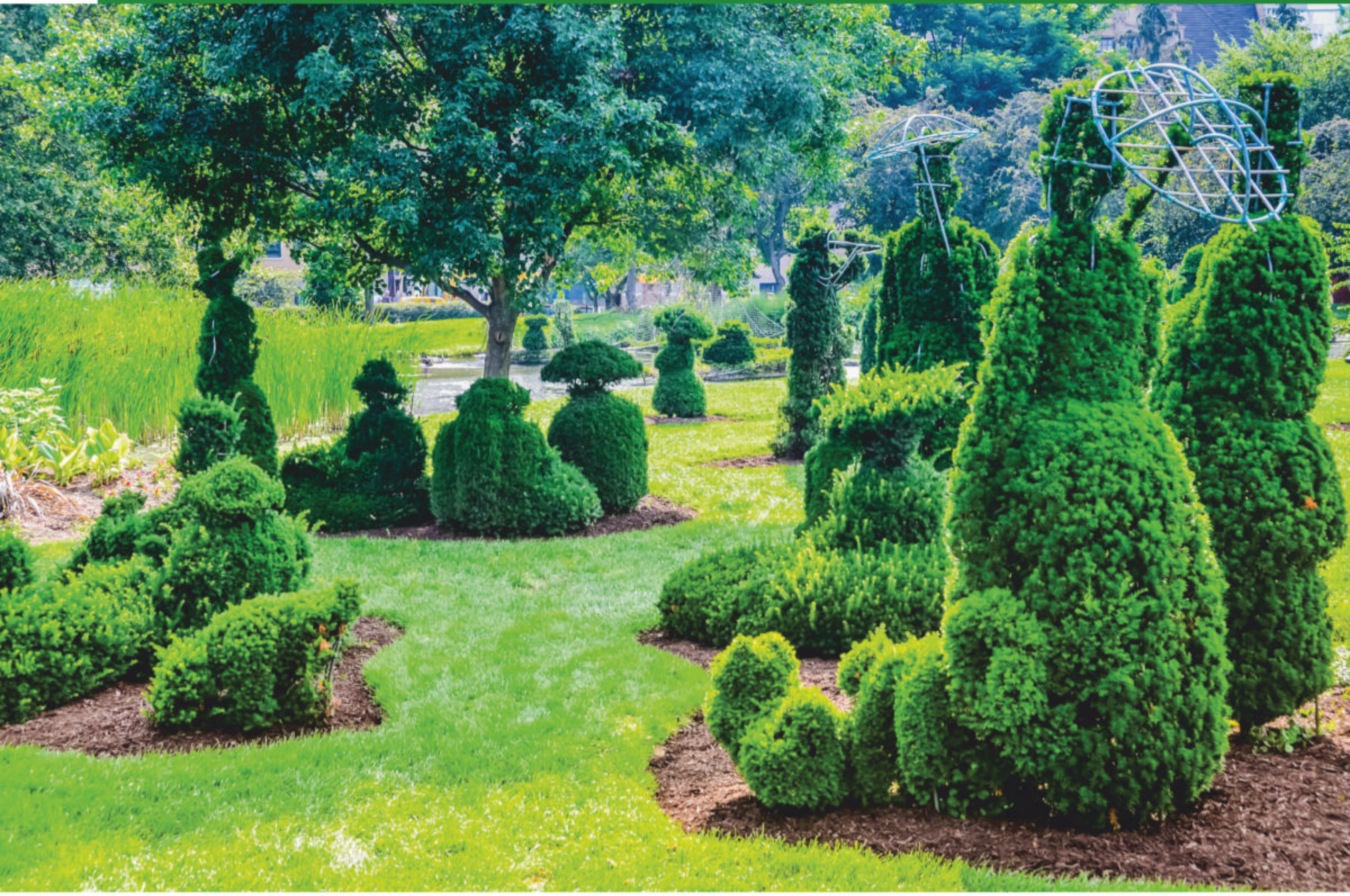
Columbus, Ohio



In 1884, Georges Seurat began a painting of his fellow Parisians gathered on the banks of the river Seine. He worked on it for years, making sketches and researching how light and color interact. In 1886, he finally finished *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, launching a new art movement called neo-impressionism.

A century later and an ocean away, American Elaine Mason tried to talk her husband, James, into helping her add a topiary—a sculpted plant—to the backyard garden. James loved the idea, but instead of sculpting plants in their own yard, the Masons made a pitch to the city of Columbus, Ohio, for an upcoming garden exhibition. In 1989 Columbus's Topiary Park was established.

Today, the topiary remains. Fifty-four green Parisians, eight boats, three dogs, a monkey and a cat stand in Columbus's Topiary Park. Visitors wander through the topiary and enjoy a Sunday afternoon far different from anything Georges Seurat ever imagined.



San Francisco Botanical Garden

This lovely garden covers 55 acres of green spaces and plant collections. Besides traditional favorites such as succulents, conifers and rhododendrons, SFBG offers a Chilean plant collection and cloud forest collections from Mesoamerica and the Andes. In a garden of ancient plants, visitors time-travel to the age of dinosaurs. California Gardens highlight the diversity of the state's native landscape, and a Moon Viewing Garden with a Japanese flavor is enticingly serene.

The San Francisco Botanical Garden is planning to merge with three neighboring green spaces, the Conservatory of Flowers and the Japanese Tea Garden, to become Gardens of Golden Gate Park. Check out the website to learn more.

www.sfbg.org/visit

Desert Botanical Garden

Phoenix, Arizona

Visitors find no lush cloud forests or dreamscapes of wispy fog settling over lawn at Desert Botanical Garden. This public garden focuses on desert plants, and particularly those of the Sonoran Desert. Trails guide visitors through gardens of desert wildflowers, forests of green-gray cactus and exhibits exploring how people and animals live in the desert. Every spring, the Butterfly Pavilion fills with thousands of fluttering butterflies of the Southwest. Learn more about desert butterflies along with admission prices and open hours from the website.

https://dbg.org/visit/plan-your-visit/

Lotusland

Montecito, California

Built over a lifetime by Polish-born opera singer Madame Ganna Walska, Lotusland is now a public garden reflecting its creator's distinctive style. Walska bought the 37-acre site in 1941 and spent four decades installing exotic plants and quirky touches. In the Topiary Garden, a working clock 25 feet across is planted with groundcover succulents and surrounded by Walska's "horticultural zoo"—26 topiary figures, including a camel, giraffe and seal. Last of the gardens Walska created is the Cycad Garden, boasting hundreds of ancient species—some of them quite rare.

Although Lotusland is nonprofit, admission is not free, and management asks that visitors make reservations in advance. Explore the website to learn more.

www.lotusland.org/visit/

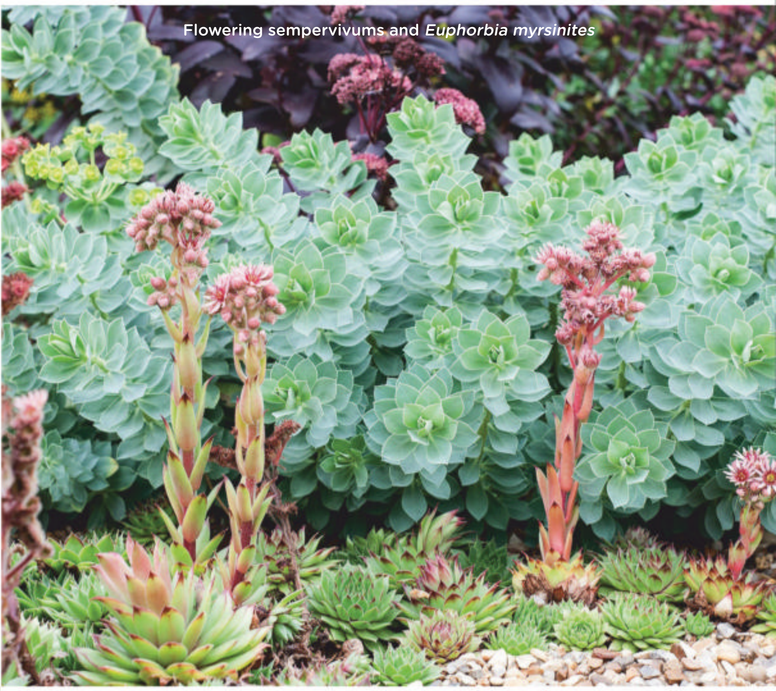
Landscaping with Succulents & Cacti

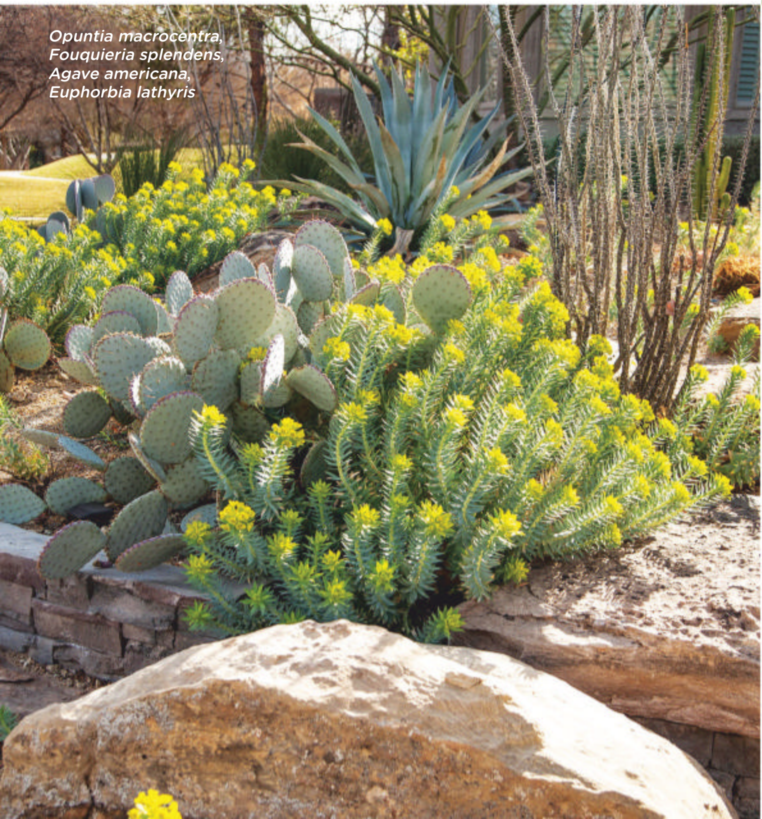
Fascination with succulents and cacti goes beyond containers on windowsills—desert plants have a solid place in landscaping, too. Designers and homeowners alike are using these plants more and more to create stunning gardens that are drought-tolerant and low-maintenance.

Designing Desert Landscapes

The landscape plan often starts with mounds and berms to improve drainage for succulents and cacti. Tall, showy cacti deliver occasional drama with round, shrubby plants mixed in. Repeated colors and shapes develop cohesive "garden rooms." Intermixing Mediterranean plants such as rosemary, whose water requirements are similar to those of desert plants, softens the look. The spikiest specimens are best in the middle of the bed, where they can't snag passers-by.

Objects give the eye something to rest on: benches, tree stumps, boulders. In a desert-themed garden, even the suggestion of water is refreshing. A darker-stone "creek" wending among plantings hints at flowing water. Birdbaths and fountains never go amiss, even if they're dry most of the time.


Flowering sempervivums and *Euphorbia myrsinites*


Opuntia macrocentra, Fouquieria splendens, Agave americana, Euphorbia lathyris

Desert Plants for Most Climates

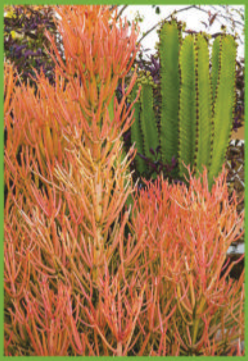
Plant lovers in mild climates have a flamboyant palette of succulents to choose from. Gardeners in colder parts of the country may have fewer choices, but some desert plants do tolerate the cold, and when temperatures drop they show off with striking hues.

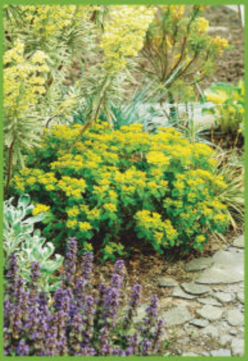
Red yucca foliage takes on a purple tinge in cold weather. On the ever-popular hens and chicks, otherwise known as *Sempervivum*, coppery edges become more prominent. Cold-hardy varieties of agave, sedum, opuntia (prickly pear) and euphorbia can be used in some four-season gardens, but beware—too much moisture will be the end of them. Succulents, cacti and euphorbia all require well-draining soil.

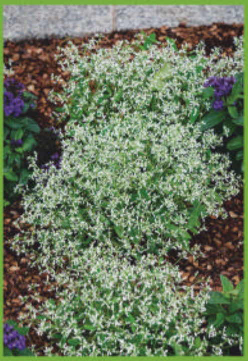
Euphorbia pulcherrima
poinsettia

About Euphorbia

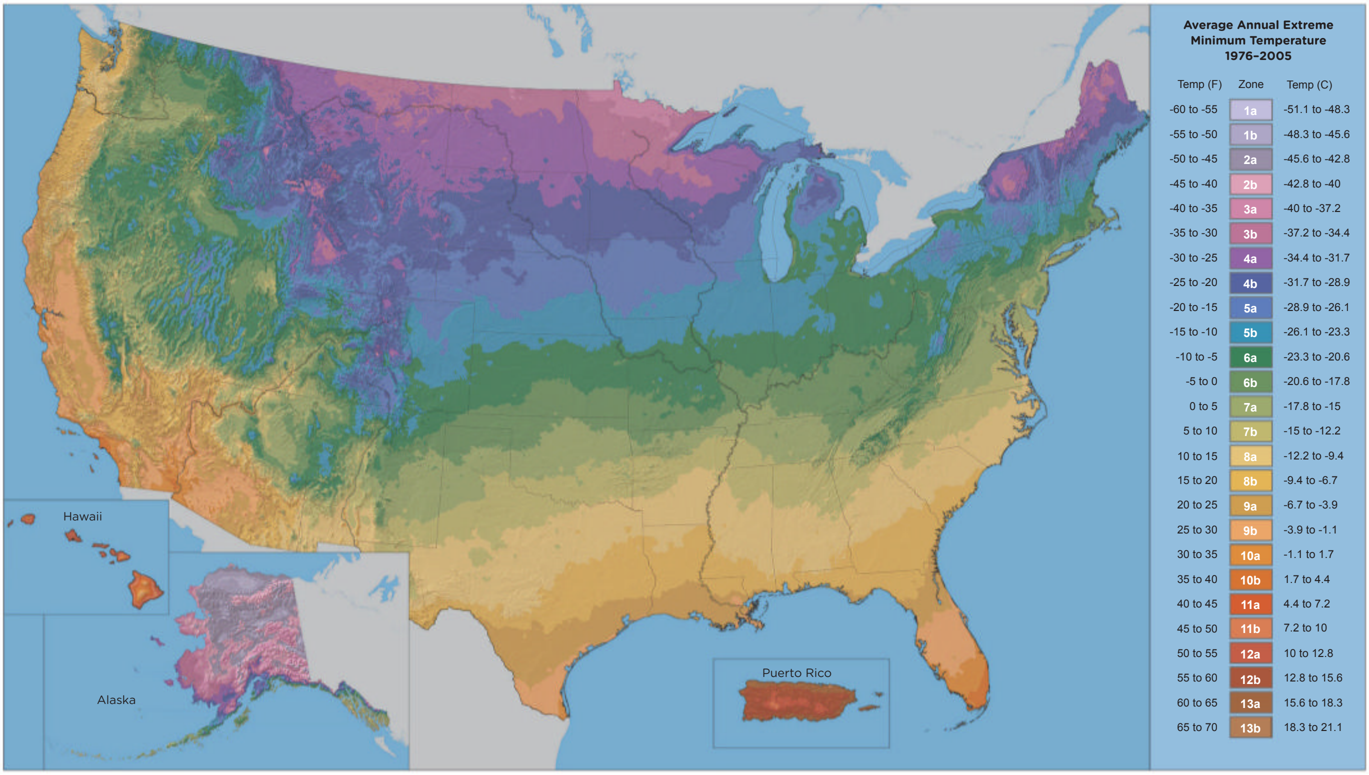
For dramatic texture, form and color, euphorbias are unbeatable. Drought-tolerant and deer-resistant, most are sun lovers, although some types will tolerate dappled shade. Alkaline or sandy soil? No problem—this plant is not choosy as long as it drains well. With literally thousands in the plant family, from poinsettia to "sticks on fire" to airy, white-blooming hybrids, euphorbias have a place in almost any garden. One thing they all have in common is irritating, poisonous sap, so handle with care.


Euphorbia tirucalli
sticks on fire


Euphorbia polychroma


Euphorbia Diamond Frost®

USDA Plant Heartiness Zone Map



Average Annual Extreme Minimum Temperature 1976–2005

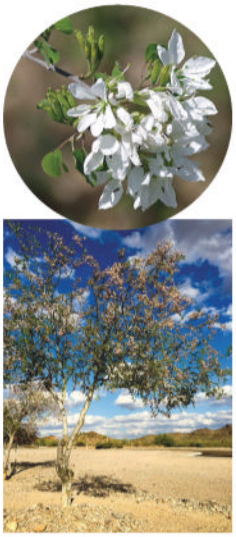
Temp (F)	Zone	Temp (C)
-60 to -55	1a	-51.1 to -48.3
-55 to -50	1b	-48.3 to -45.6
-50 to -45	2a	-45.6 to -42.8
-45 to -40	2b	-42.8 to -40
-40 to -35	3a	-40 to -37.2
-35 to -30	3b	-37.2 to -34.4
-30 to -25	4a	-34.4 to -31.7
-25 to -20	4b	-31.7 to -28.9
-20 to -15	5a	-28.9 to -26.1
-15 to -10	5b	-26.1 to -23.3
-10 to -5	6a	-23.3 to -20.6
-5 to 0	6b	-20.6 to -17.8
0 to 5	7a	-17.8 to -15
5 to 10	7b	-15 to -12.2
10 to 15	8a	-12.2 to -9.4
15 to 20	8b	-9.4 to -6.7
20 to 25	9a	-6.7 to -3.9
25 to 30	9b	-3.9 to -1.1
30 to 35	10a	-1.1 to 1.7
35 to 40	10b	1.7 to 4.4
40 to 45	11a	4.4 to 7.2
45 to 50	11b	7.2 to 10
50 to 55	12a	10 to 12.8
55 to 60	12b	12.8 to 15.6
60 to 65	13a	15.6 to 18.3
65 to 70	13b	18.3 to 21.1

DESERT SURVIVOR

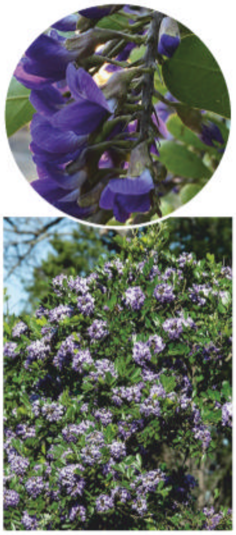
The trunk of the **desert ironwood** tree is filled with toxic chemicals that make it almost impervious to rot. This superslow grower has some of the densest, heaviest wood in the plant world. A few ironwood trees in Arizona's desert forests are thought to be 800 years old, and some stumps have survived for 1,600 years!

Desert Trees

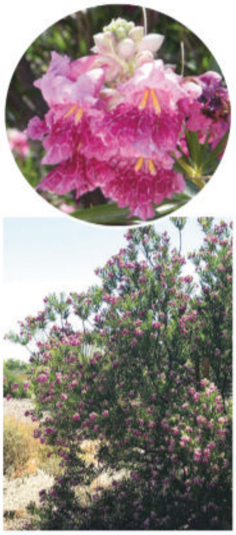
Succulent gardens don't have to be desert-themed, of course, but many are. In a desert-themed garden, trees from the desert fit right in. Cold-climate gardeners should speak to local experts to find appropriate trees for their areas.



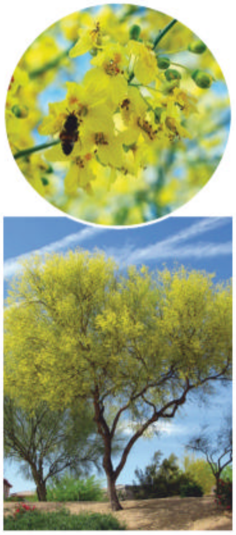
On the delicate side is the **Anacacho orchid tree** (*Bauhinia lunarioides*), topping out at about eight feet tall and six feet wide. Dainty white or pink flowers draw bees in spring.



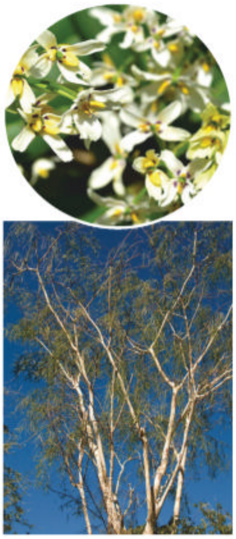
Texas mountain laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*) has glossy evergreen foliage and clusters of fragrant purple spring flowers. It can reach 30 feet in the right conditions. The bright red seeds are poisonous.



Desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) is magnificent at 20 feet tall and 10 to 15 feet wide. Its pinkish-purplish blossoms are heaviest in the spring, but will continue to appear after rain throughout the growing season.



Of a similar size is **palo verde** (*Parkinsonia aculeata*), often called retama or Jerusalem thorn. Bees love its yellow blossoms in spring and occasionally through the summer.



Palo blanco (*Mariosousa heterophylla*) also stands about 20 feet tall and 10 to 15 feet wide with weeping foliage and white bark that peels off in sheets. It needs a sheltered location in full sun.

Succulent Cuttings in Floral Design

The unusual foliage and hues of succulent plants stand out beautifully in floral arrangements—every cutting garden should include a few of these plants. Cuttings of succulents last for weeks, allowing for advance preparation if you want to decorate for social events. As an added bonus, succulent cuttings may be replanted in the garden after the arrangement is past its prime.

Caring for Desert Plants

Whether desert plants live in the ground or in containers, drainage is a key concern. In the growing season, it's best to water them when they are dry, rather than on a set schedule, and give them little or no water when they are not growing. Mixing sand into the soil and elevating planters on terracotta "feet" will help keep plants healthy. Fertilizing once or twice a month with diluted fertilizer such as liquid seaweed will give them a boost during growing season. Direct, all-day sun can burn some succulents and cacti, so it's a good idea to do a little research on the light needs of individual species.

Right Plant, Right Pot

Terracotta draws moisture out of soil; "moisture line" shows when soil is damp; good for plants with low-water needs

Glazed holds in moisture more than terracotta; good for plants that need lots of water; tend to be more expensive than other types of containers

Wood insulates roots in very hot weather; good for plants whose roots need to be cool

Metal absorbs heat from the sun; can warm plants in cool places but may burn them in hot climes; soil dries out quickly

Plastic lightweight and usually inexpensive; best for indoor plants because prolonged exposure to sun can damage some plastics

Perennial Herbs

Perennial and evergreen herbs require less time and attention than annuals—although they do need seasonal pruning to keep them looking good and their foliage tender. Rosemary and bay, especially, provide structure in winter herb gardens. Ground-hugging thyme and oregano are evergreen in many climates, as well. Sage is perennial in some areas; if it survives the winter without dying to the ground, it will need a good pruning in spring.

Herb Gardens to Love

For millennia, humans have found room in their gardens for herbs. Egyptian and Asian gardeners grew herbs for medicines; medieval Europeans sowed culinary plants along with medicinal ones; herb gardens of the 17th and 18th century were often points of pride, handsome outdoor rooms that also delivered seasonings and cures. Today's gardeners grow herbs for all of these reasons and more.

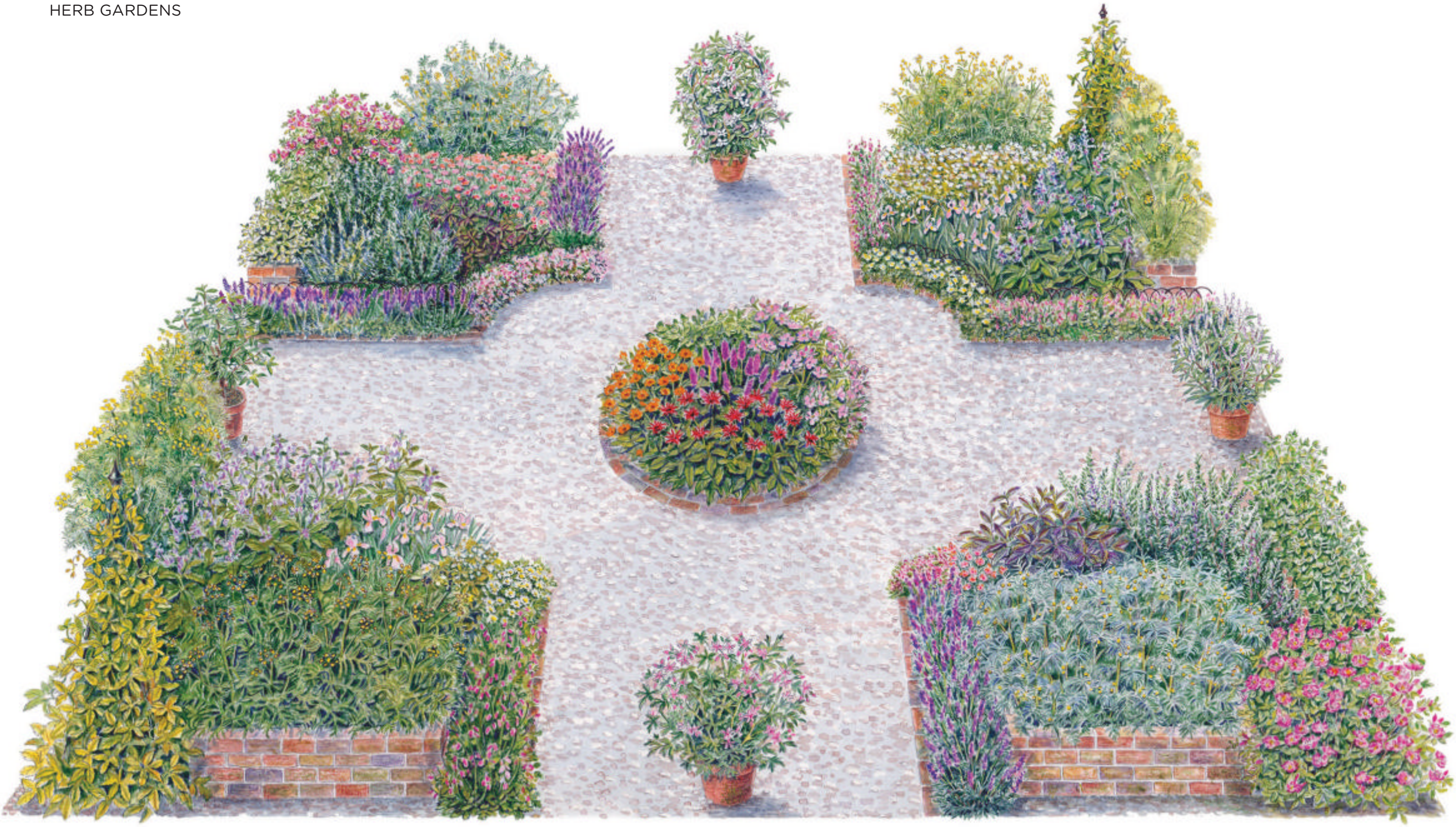
Sensory herb gardens include fragrances of mint and lavender, along with touchable herbs like woolly thyme and sage. Bee gardens flavor the beekeeper's honey with basil, lavender and lemon balm, or attract pollinators for gardens without beehives. Literary types grow Shakespearean gardens with herbs that the playwright mentioned in his works, such as marjoram and chamomile.

Windowsill Herb Gardens

A small pot on a bright windowsill is all that many culinary herbs need. Pots that are at least four inches across—six is better—keep soil moisture even. If you combine herbs in larger pots, separate moisture-loving plants like mint from plants that prefer less moisture, like sage.

The best plant list for a cook's windowsill garden will include the herbs most often used. Good candidates for windowsill gardens include basil, chives, cilantro, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary and thyme. They will eventually outgrow small containers, but most will root from cuttings taken from the old plant.

Mediterranean Herbs for Dry Climates Mediterranean herbs like rosemary, parsley, oregano, marjoram and lavender need little water once established and many can tolerate the harshest sunlight; they are a saving grace for green spaces in hot, dry places. Few animals are interested in nibbling on them, and they flourish in coarse soil with little organic matter. Most herbs in this class will also thrive in containers on a sunny balcony.

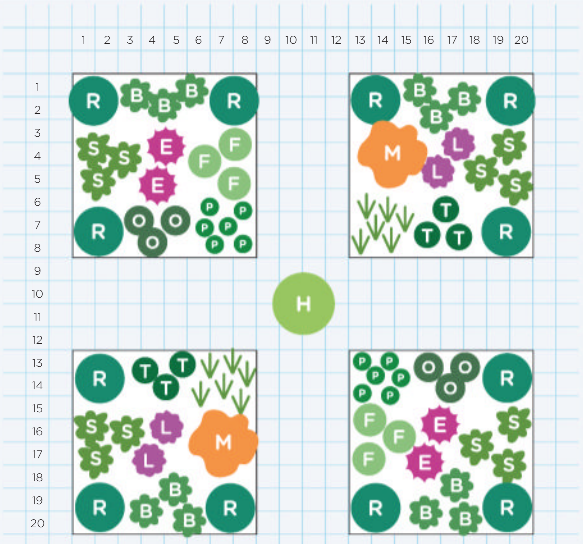


Formal Herb Gardens

If a formal herb garden with knots and geometrically shaped beds is your cup of tea, you're not alone. Pleasingly symmetrical herb gardens are as popular today as they ever have been. The key to formal gardens, especially herb gardens, is symmetry. Wheels or rectangles of hedge, for example, divide the formal garden into equally sized sections that may be planted with herbs that complement each other in shape, size and color. A slightly less work-intensive plan involves creating outer shapes with containers. Fill interior spaces with herbs that have similar growth habits.

Formal Herb Garden Plan

In this sample plan, rosemary and hops in containers establish shape and focal points for a formal herb garden.



Dimensions: 20 ft. x 20 ft.

Plant List:

- R Rosemary in containers x 12
- H Hops growing on an obelisk x 1
- E Echinacea x 4
- L Lavender x 4
- B Basil x 12
- S Sage x 12
- P Parsley x 12
- V Chives x 12
- T Thyme x 6
- O Oregano x 6
- F Fennel x 6
- M Marigold x 2

Pointers for Growing Herbs

Growing herbs is a lot like growing vegetables and flowers, and many gardeners grow them all together. Yet treating herbs just a little bit differently has some advantages.

- Mediterranean herbs are mostly native to soil that is rocky and a bit on the alkaline side. Planting them in rich garden soil may encourage bolting, or flowering.
- Most herbs don't benefit from regular fertilizing. One feeding early in the growing season should be enough.
- Some herbs, such as mint, will take over small gardens. To keep roots from spreading, put aggressive plants in one-gallon plastic pots and set the pots in the ground.
- Harvest often to keep herbs healthy and delicious. Clippings that aren't used right away can hang upside down in a dark closet to dry for later use.

Herbs and Deer

One extra-special benefit of growing herbs is that deer, who tend to enjoy a vegetable garden as much as we do, tend to stay away from the best ones. They don't seem to like the fragrance of rosemary, culinary sage, horseradish or oregano, for example. Lavender and thyme are also pretty safe bets. Basil, on the other hand, is less reliably deer-resistant. The same can be said of mint. As a rule, plants with fuzzy leaves are unappealing to deer, so catnip and borage are not deer favorites. The reality is, however, that a very hungry deer will eat almost anything green and growing.

Best Basil

Basil, perfect companion for tomatoes, needs summer warmth, soil with ample drainage and at least six hours of sunlight. Given those things, it's an easy herb to grow. Frequent harvesting and pinching back of the strongest stalks helps prevent flowering—once it bolts, the flavor changes. The best time to harvest is in the morning, when foliage is moist and tender. Favorite varieties include Genovese (sometimes called sweet basil) for Italian dishes, lime or lemon basil for seafood, purple basil (tasty in salads) and Thai basil for that anise-like flavor so beloved in many Asian foods.

Gardening with Deer

Anyone who gardens in deer country has heard this from visitors: "Oh, look at all the deer! Aren't they beautiful!" There is no question that the deer are beautiful. They also pull up expensive plants or eat them right down to the ground, strip rose bushes of the most prized blossoms, trample vegetable gardens and knock down small trees by scraping antlers against them. Most gardeners would prefer to cherish deer from afar.

Coping Mechanisms

When one or two loners wander into the garden, some folks find that repellents solve the problem. Homemade or store-bought, smelly products made with rotten eggs, garlic or ammonia confuse the deer and sometimes persuade them to munch elsewhere. Since they tend to browse regularly in the same places, diligent reapplication is required.

Some gardeners have good luck with motion-activated lights, sprinklers and noisemakers to scare away skittish deer. In the same vein, reflective yard art—especially things with noisy moving parts—may startle an animal enough to make it move on. However, in food-rich suburban environments where deer are nearly tame, scare tactics may be wasted effort. Suburban deer are as stubborn as two-year-old humans!

Hence, the Fence

If you have the resources and the right property, fencing *may* be an effective way to keep deer out of the garden. Here are a few considerations:

- The fence has to be something that deer cannot or will not jump over. Eight feet is the generally accepted height needed for a deer fence.
- If an eight-foot fence is not in the cards, a double fence might do the job: one five-foot fence inside another with five feet or so between them. The idea is that deer won't jump between the two fences because the space is too tight for their comfort, and the barrier is too wide for them to leap across.
- Where no young children play, an electric fence may be an option.
- Some gardeners find success with less substantial barriers, such as deer netting. These animals figure things out pretty quickly, though. When bucks prance through the neighborhood with banners of deer netting streaming from their antlers, it's a sign that netting is not the answer.

Stachys byzantina and *Salvia officinalis*

Deer-Resistant Planting

Restricting the garden to deer-resistant plants may limit the damage they do. Most of the plants that deer find unappealing have foliage in one of four categories: fuzzy, leathery, toxic or smelly.

Phlomis fruticosa

Fuzzy, furry plants like lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*) and Jerusalem sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*) are good bets. Culinary sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is both fuzzy and highly fragrant. Prickly foliage is less reliably deer-resistant, but most deer will avoid plants like sea holly (*Eryngium*) and globe thistle (*Echinops*).

Echinops

The strappy blades on irises don't seem to be deer favorites, and they are toxic, too. Yucca blades are leathery and sharp, so they appear on lists of deer-resistant plants, although a hungry deer will stand on its hind legs to reach the blossom spikes. These plants need protection when they're blooming. Elephant ear (*Alocasia*) is toxic and usually deer-resistant; its large, leathery foliage is sometimes used to screen more tempting plants behind it.

Alocasia

Whether you call it angel's trumpet, moon flower or jimson weed, the hand-sized white blossom of *Datura stramonium* is an ephemeral stunner, but don't be fooled by appearances. Every part of this plant is poisonous, and deer usually avoid it entirely. Other toxic beauties include most hollies, daffodils, oleander, sago palms and caladiums. (These plants are also toxic to animals and humans.)

Datura stramonium

Smelly plants are a particular favorite among gardeners because some of the scents that repel deer attract people. Who can resist touching rosemary foliage and then sniffing the fingertips for that clean fragrance? Well, deer don't like that smell at all. They also usually avoid lantana, bee balm (*Monarda*), Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) and Copper Canyon daisies (*Tagetes lemonii*).

Monarda (pink) and *Eryngium*

Tagetes lemonii

Advocates of deer-resistant garden design say that planting masses of fuzzy, leathery, toxic or smelly plants distracts the animals from tender plants beyond, minimizing deer damage. And planting wide beds loosely, with diverse assortments of plants, makes damage that does happen less obvious. Deer will visit masses of prairie grasses and wildflower meadows, but the billowing look disguises half-eaten plants.

What keeps deer away in one garden might not work in another. Perhaps more frustratingly for gardeners, what works today might not work at all next year! Constantly changing populations of deer mean constantly changing problems that gardeners address in ever-evolving ways.

Perovskia atriplicifolia

Everybody needs beauty
as well as bread,
places to play in and pray in,
where nature may heal and
give strength to body and soul alike.

— **JOHN MUIR,** ***The Yosemite***

Healing Gardens

Every gardener knows: on the worst of days, the tiniest tender, green sprout can be healing. An hour spent in a sunny garden can reveal a healthier perspective on problems. Gardening—almost any type of gardening—can reduce high blood pressure and the flow of a stress hormone called cortisol.

Fragrant Conifers

Inhale and imagine a clean-smelling pine forest. Exhale and stress flows away. The restorative effect of that fragrance—the smell of a conifer forest—is real; scientific studies suggest that breathing the essential oils produced by pines and other conifers is good for us and may even have anti-inflammatory effects. Including conifers in the healing garden doesn't have to mean planting a pine forest. Joppi Jeffrey pine has long, aromatic needles but tops out at about ten feet in height, or six to seven feet in a container. Dwarf Globe blue spruce and Blue Angel white pine also stay fairly compact.

For people recovering from emotional or physical trauma, less stress can mean reduced pain and a stronger immune system. Folks experiencing depression and anxiety have been shown to benefit from creating, caring for and harvesting food from gardens. And because gardening typically involves physical activity, thought and planning, and social interaction, seniors who garden often sleep better, move better, think better and feel better in general.

Healing at Home

What goes into a garden for healing? Sensory elements, for one. The sounds of water burbling through a rill and the breezy swish of ornamental grasses soothe the mind. Most healing gardens include fragrant plants—lemon verbena next to a path releases perfume when visitors brush its foliage in passing. Textural plants like lamb's ear, artichoke and fennel invite touch and reflect light in captivating ways. Ponds with wildlife distract us from problems and focus our thoughts on natural beauty. Even a tiny birdbath can draw enough wildlife to divert a troubled mind. Perhaps most importantly, a healing garden has spaces for quiet reflection, play and communing with others. Think of a shady bench under a tree for chatting, a rectangle of lush lawn for games, tables and chairs in a courtyard for small gatherings.

Accessibility in the Healing Garden

Safe and obstruction-free for everyone, a healing garden has level pathways that are wide enough for walkers and wheelchairs. Lightweight seating can be moved into or out of shade. Beds and water spigots may be raised to a level that's comfortable for the garden's users. Faucets with levers are easier on hands with arthritis than faucets with round knobs.

A person with limited mobility easily harvests apples from "step-over" espaliered trees, standard fruit trees grafted onto dwarf rootstock and trained to grow flat against a wall or frame. Fruit trees can be espaliered at any height along sturdy frames. Vertical garden methods such as growing vines on trellises and "living wall" planters keep plants within reach of folks who can't easily bend over. Patients in chemotherapy should avoid flowers with strong, sweet scents.

Tools to Look For

Gardening reduces stress, but crawling out of bed the next day with a painful back and aching knees can bring it all right back. Here are five garden tools to save the back, knees and hands.

Long-handled weeding tools put an end to bending over to pull dandelions. Some tools have foot-operated "claws" to grab weeds.

A **folding garden seat/kneeler** makes bending over unnecessary. Some have pockets for tools.

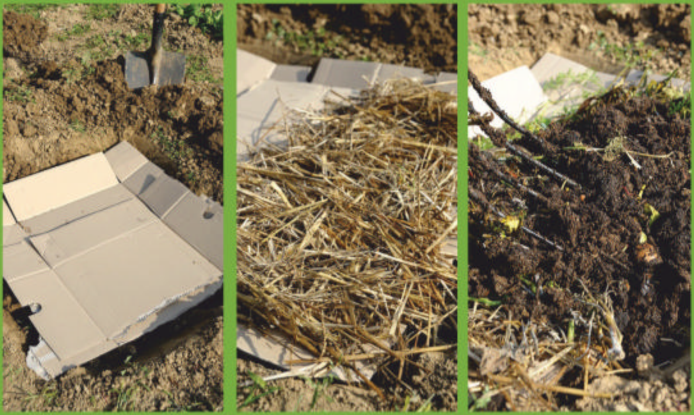
You can dig holes from your garden seat using a **short-handled shovel.**

There will be no more lugging heavy tools or stepping on rakes once you have a **wheeled tool caddy** to roll through the garden with you.

Use a **hose wand** to water plants and lawn, instead of clamping a thumb over the hose end.

THE NO-DIG GARDEN

Gardeners know that, every spring, tilling the vegetable garden is a backbreaking task. But there is a choice. Skip this step! By not tilling, the gardener preserves the soil's natural structure and all the little creatures that live in it. To start a no-dig garden, mow or remove large weeds and leave the cuttings in place. Add a thin layer of compost to speed decomposition of the cuttings. Then put down dampened newspaper or cardboard to starve existing weeds of light. Top that layer with two inches of compost and let the garden rest for a few weeks. When it's time to plant, dig holes through the layers—holes just big enough for the plants, because there's no need to amend the soil. From this point on, every spring will begin with a layer of compost instead of tilling.



Community Gardens

A community garden is a growing space managed by the people of a community. Whether the garden grows food, herbs, flowers, native plants or any combination of these, it's a community garden if the community manages it. The group of local people who manage the garden may not all be gardeners; tasks such as building structures, organizing and decision-making are at least as important as gardening.

People form community gardens for all sorts of reasons. Gardeners get together to learn from each other and enjoy a sense of belonging. Some folks want to garden with their neighbors because fresh, affordable foods are hard to find in their areas. Some gardens bring community members together when hard times seem to be pulling them apart. Some gardens are created because people want to grow food organically and sustainably.

One of the many community gardens in this country was founded in 1974 in Austin, Texas, and remains an ongoing concern. Successes and challenges in the garden inspired change—Sunshine Community Garden is now in its third location, and organizational structure has evolved to meet the needs of its members. Today, with a little more than 250 gardeners, SCG leases a plot of about three acres in central Austin. Some gardeners there grow vegetables, some grow flowers, and most grow a combination of the two. There are a chicken coop, compost heaps, a tool shed, and a whole lot of shared goodwill. Oh, and there's produce, too, in abundance!

At Sunshine Community Gardens, neighbors do whatever they wish with the product of their labors, whether that's taking it home or donating it to a food bank that the organization supports. In some community gardens, neighbors work together to farm one space and share or donate the food that they grow. In other CGs where the garden's purpose is something other than growing food—such as therapy or vocational training—produce grown in the garden may be free and available to people in the community. How fruit and vegetables are distributed really comes down to the essential purposes of the garden.

Eating Local

A little more than 50 years ago, a chef named Alice Waters opened a restaurant in Berkeley, California, based on the idea that quality ingredients were key to good food. Waters offered a constantly changing menu based on what was locally available and good-tasting at any given moment. Thus the local food movement was born. Today, Americans widely recognize that locally grown food tastes better and is more nutritious than food grown halfway across the continent. Eating local also benefits regional economies and limits environmental damage, all of which contributes to the enormous popularity of community gardens and farmers' markets.

Starting a Community Garden

Are you thinking of organizing a community garden? The first thing to do is identify a community. Talk to people and find out who is interested, who might benefit and what skills and resources those people can offer. Use social media, flyers, school PTAs, houses of worship and neighborhood groups to get the word out. Once you know that the community supports the idea of a garden, it's time to take concrete steps.

1 Do some **research** to discover any grants or sponsors that might be available.

2 **Organize** planning meetings to establish the garden's purpose. Discuss organizational structure, problem resolution and rules. Set up a leadership-sharing structure and insure transparency in the decision-making process.

3 **Find a site.** Look for a sunny piece of land that will be available for an extended period and has access to water and space for parking.

4 **Set up workdays** to prepare the site. Utilize members' skills to build raised beds, a tool shed and fences.

5 Schedule another meeting to assign garden plots and set up systems to see that garden-wide chores such as mowing paths get done. **Review** organizational structure, problem resolution and rules, revising as needed. Everything should be put in writing and posted on a website so members have easy access.

6 **Stay in touch.** Regular meetings, social events, workdays and newsletters all help to boost the community in community gardening.

The gardeners at Sunshine Community Gardens are there for all sorts of reasons.

"It's a lot of fun being out here."

"I don't have sun in my own backyard."

"I've met a lot of people I didn't know before."

"We help with [the school's] horticultural program."

"A garden is the most wonderful reliever of stress."

"I was helping my friend."

"You just get a feeling of freedom out here."

"It's like a microcosm of the whole world, but it's not serious."

"This is my social life."

"If you have excess, you contribute it to the food bank."

"Isn't it lovely?"

HERE TO HELP

If you'd like to take part in a community garden or start one in your area, the following organizations offer resources with down-and-dirty details.

Soil Science Society of America https://www.soils.org/about-soils/community-gardens/

The American Community Gardening Association https://www.communitygarden.org/resources

The U.S. Department of Agriculture https://www.nal.usda.gov/legacy/afsic/community-gardening

AARP https://createthegood.aarp.org/volunteer-guides/community-garden.html

Serenity in the Shade

There is something very appealing about a tranquil, shady garden: curling fingers of new fern growth; cool, dark tree trunks; dancing spots of sunlight on broad-leaved plants. Some gardeners see shade as a problem, while others find in it opportunity.Shade is not one thing. Deep shade gets little or no sunlight, whereas full shade warms up with an hour or two of morning sun. Light and partial shade occur at the edges of shady places and in clearings where sunlight falls, at least in dappled patterns, for five or so hours each day. All of this matters because plants that thrive in deep shade may scorch in light shade. So do your research.

Layering Plants in Shade

Lavish shade gardens are planted in layers, beginning with understory trees and tall shrubs to give the garden structure. Redbud is a nice choice for light to partial shade—in early spring, pink and purple blossoms dust its otherwise bare branches, attracting bees. Dogwoods flourish in partial to full shade, with delicate spring blossoms that recall hovering butterflies. Some Japanese maples, famous for striking fall color, tolerate full shade. The evergreen Japanese yew can reach 30 feet in height and will grow in sun or full shade.

Shrubs and vines are the next layer. Think of fern and hosta for sensuous greenery and azalea, rhododendron and hydrangea for masses of color. The glossy foliage of mountain laurel and camellia is a welcome sight in winter, and both of these shrubs bloom as well. Vines clambering up trellises and tree trunks add romance above low shrubs: clematis vines grow quickly in partial shade, as do sweet pea, wild potato vine, Carolina jasmine and honeysuckle.

Groundcover is the third layer, adding softness that fills in empty spots and borders the garden path. Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) makes a soft mat in dry shade and tolerates drought well. Nothing is as woodsy as sweet woodruff, with its clouds of tiny, white flowers. Yellow creeping Jenny is a splash of zingy color alongside a path.

Paths and Destinations

Hardscaping—artificial elements—creates destinations and purpose for exploring. A winding path leads visitors in, while a path with a hidden ending is mysterious. A straight, formal path promotes structure in the garden, clarifying beginnings and turning points. The hues in paving materials may bounce and repeat in foliage and flowers, inviting wanderers to visit the next spot of color along the way.

The Truth about Ferns

It's a mistake to think of ferns as plants for damp and shady glens; the truth is that every type of fern is different. Sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*), for example, is an evergreen that tolerates dry periods. Maidenhair fern thrives in moist alkaline soil. With regular watering, it can put up with some sun. Evergreen wood fern (*Dryopteris intermedia*) performs well in partial to full shade and grows wild as far north as Maine. There is a fern for nearly every garden!

Planting under Deciduous Trees

Mature trees that block the sun all summer and drop their leaves in the fall can be a problem. Not only does light at ground level change from season to season, but the largest specimens slurp up most of the moisture in the soil. None of this means that a dreamy garden won't grow beneath deciduous trees—only that a bit of forethought is needed.

- Keeping beds at ground level (no raised beds) ensures that surface roots of trees will have the air they need to breathe. Using young plants in small containers allows gardeners to dig small holes. A thin layer of compost each spring keeps the soil healthy.
- Avoid scraping tree trunks with tools, as injured wood invites disease and pests.
- Staggered bloom times make efficient use of changing light. Crocus and daffodil pop up when trees are still bare and finish blooming before trees are fully leafed out. Later bloomers should be plants that can tolerate some shade, such as Serbian bellflower and geraniums.
- Plants with interesting foliage—ferns, ornamental grasses, hostas and coral bells (*Heuchera*)—offer excitement when sunlight is scarce.

Hosta for Shade

With broad leaves and mounding habits, hostas are the perfect companion plant for ferns. They do bloom, but are usually grown for their striking foliage. Hostas prefer rich soil that drains well, some shade and deep but infrequent watering. The lush foliage is an invitation to slugs, which come out at night and leave little (sometimes big) holes in leaves. To control slugs, rake away mulch and debris under plants, scatter coffee grounds to kill the slugs and water only in the morning.

Veggies for Shady Gardens

If your vegetable garden is a little on the shady side, then leafy greens are your friends. Arugula, kale, lettuce and Swiss chard can all thrive without full sun. In fact, these plants perform best in cooler microclimates. Many brassicas—broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower—grow well with a bit of shade, too. Some root crops, including carrots, beets, potatoes and radishes, may benefit from a few hours of shade each day, especially in warm climates. To learn the best vegetables for shady gardens in your area, contact the local agricultural extension service.

Gorgeous Side Yards

Narrow side yards are often neglected by gardeners, but this rarely used space can become an inspired garden room—a dining destination or a secret garden with a bench and fountain. It can be a hidden passage, covered with an arbor or shielded by a tall hedge that visually separates your home from your neighbor's. It can be a Zen sanctuary, paved with gravel, populated by favorite things and luxe plantings.

Add an intriguing gate to the side garden to suggest that a magical journey awaits beyond. Checkerboard paving will visually widen a long, narrow side yard, especially if it's set on the diagonal. To limit the looming feel of a long stretch of wall, hang living planters on the side of the house. Interrupt long lines by planting a small tree or building an arbor across the space. Take advantage of the shade to set up a protected play area, fairy garden, or quiet retreat for afternoon naps.

Lush & Luxuriant Moss

Moss is everywhere, on every continent, under your feet and over your head, glowing in gloomy caves and gripping the last ounces of soil on freezing, rocky mountaintops. It is resilient enough to grow in the most extreme land environments. Moss is an amazing carbon sink, sequestering about one-third of the world's terrestrial carbon.

At this moment, it is insulating frozen arctic ground from the effects of the sun, thereby slowing the melting of polar ice. Mosses are the oldest land plants; *T. rex* would have chased its prey through mossy terrain.

If your grass is struggling to survive because of dense shade, consider moss as a first-rate replacement for a lawn. It doesn't need all those fall and spring feedings—moss doesn't absorb nutrients from soil because it has no roots (it has other ways to take in water and nutrition). Moss can tolerate light foot traffic, and while it grows slowly, moss can spread over large areas.

Moss in Small Garden Spaces

Small, shady portions of the garden are good places to grow moss—dark corners shadowed by fences, skinny beds along walkways that never see sunlight. To establish moss in your garden, you'll need a few things:

Moss sheets are expensive, so many gardeners tear them into smaller pieces before setting them out. After clearing the area of debris, loosen the soil with a rake. Press the pieces of moss firmly down on the surface and secure them with pins or a lightweight net. Then do what gardeners do best: water and wait.

Moss Matters

- **Light:** Most mosses prefer dappled or deep shade.
- **Water:** Many mosses are drought-tolerant—hard to believe, right? Most mosses want regular water, but not as much as a lawn does. Some mosses need to dry out once in a while for brief periods of time.
- **Growing surface:** Mosses need smooth surfaces to spread over. Some sources suggest growing it on weed barrier. Soil pH doesn't matter too much, because there are mosses that will grow in most types of soil.
- **Hardiness:** Most mosses are winter hardy.

More Possibilities

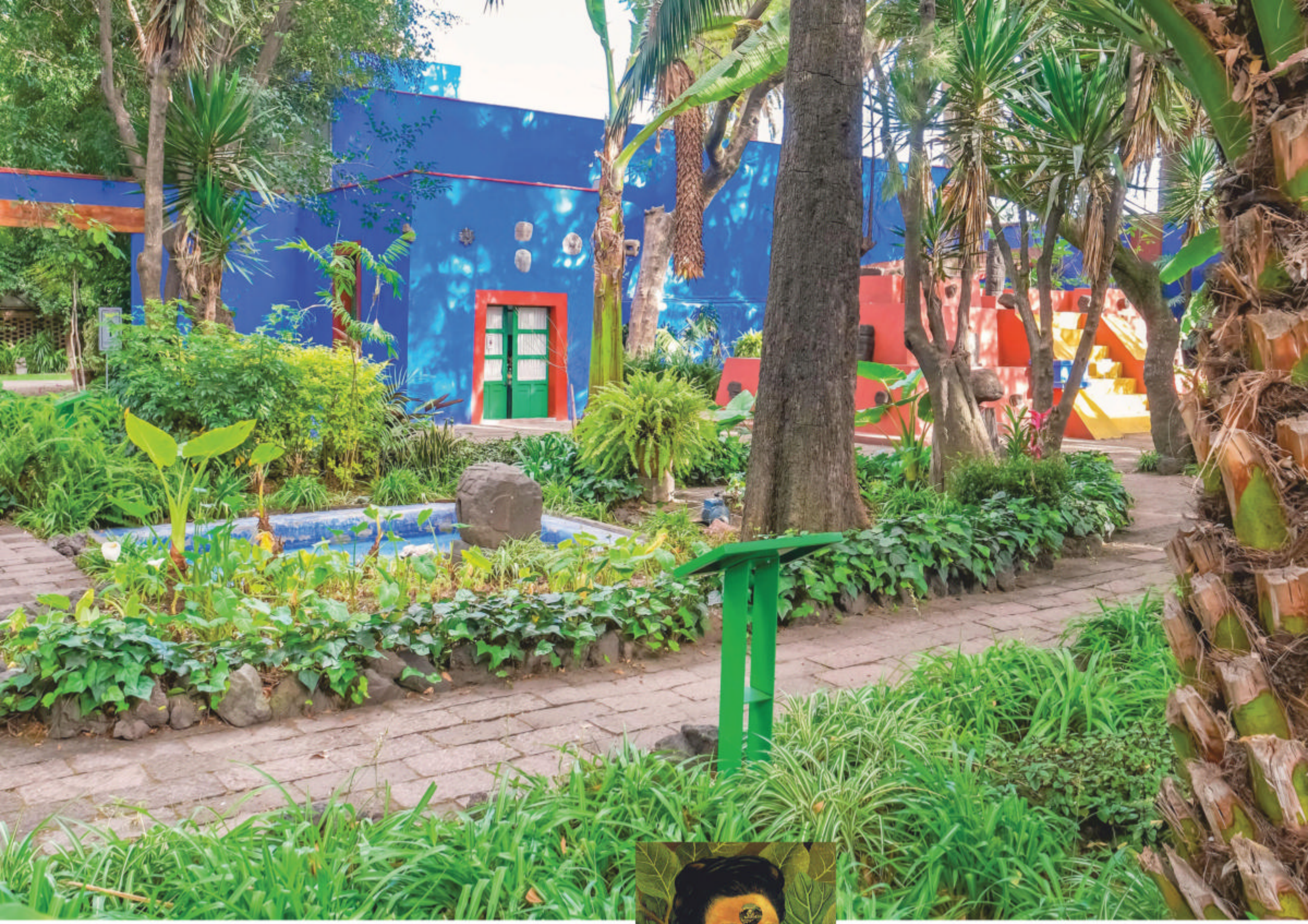
Moss is far from the only alternative to a grass lawn. Here are some other shade-tolerant options:

sweet woodruff, an edible herb, low-growing, blooms with white flowers, never needs mowing

clover, blooming groundcover that you can walk on; never needs to be mowed and rarely watered

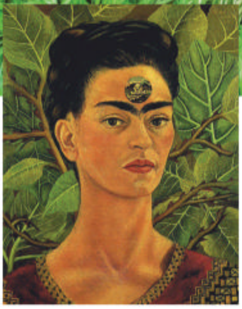
low-growing **sedums** that tolerate quite a bit of shade, but not foot traffic; may bloom with star-shaped yellow flowers

artificial turf, the most low-maintenance option



Artists & Gardens

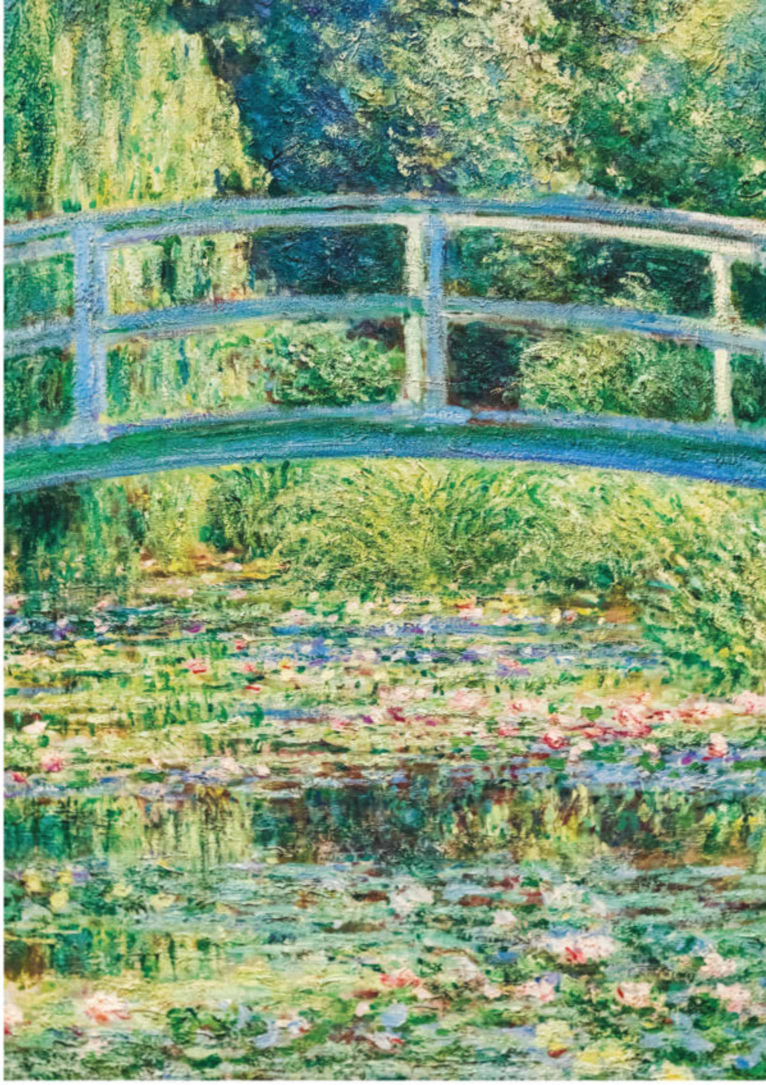
For some people, the two endeavors—art and gardening—are inextricably linked. Artists often look at things in ways that are just slightly different from the outlook of the rest of us. That fresh take on life often inspires the way artists use color, texture and composition in their gardens.



Frida Kahlo's Casa Azul & Courtyard Garden

Twentieth-century Mexican artist Frida Kahlo grew up in the house that would become Casa Azul, or Blue House, in Mexico City. In 1929, her father gave the house to Kahlo and her artist husband, Diego Rivera. At that point, Kahlo and Rivera made over the house and garden with special emphasis on the art and plants of Mexico. They installed Mexican natives such as prickly pear, agave and palms; they added precolonial sculptures and a stepped pyramid; they had the exterior walls painted a brilliant blue.

The garden's flowers and plants appeared in Kahlo's art, and she sometimes wore bougainvillea blossoms woven into her hair. The canna lilies so prominent in Rivera's work bloomed in the courtyard at Casa Azul as well. In her lifetime, Kahlo nurtured the plants and animals of Casa Azul's garden, finding refuge there when poor health restricted her activities. Today, the house and garden are a museum.



Water Lily Pond 1899

Claude Monet's Garden in Giverny, France

The garden of French artist Claude Monet certainly inspired his paintings, and the knowledge of color and texture that he put to use in painting seems to have inspired the way he gardened.

The impressionist painter was a devoted gardener, constantly experimenting. Colors of his garden appear over and over in his paintings, and as an artist he paid much attention to the way light reflects off surfaces, especially water. As a gardener, Monet planted monochromatic swathes of plants to create drama, and he used plants in complementary colors to make each bloom seem richer, more vibrant. He placed water where it would reflect paintable vignettes, such as the famous green footbridge and shimmering water lilies.

Incorporating Art

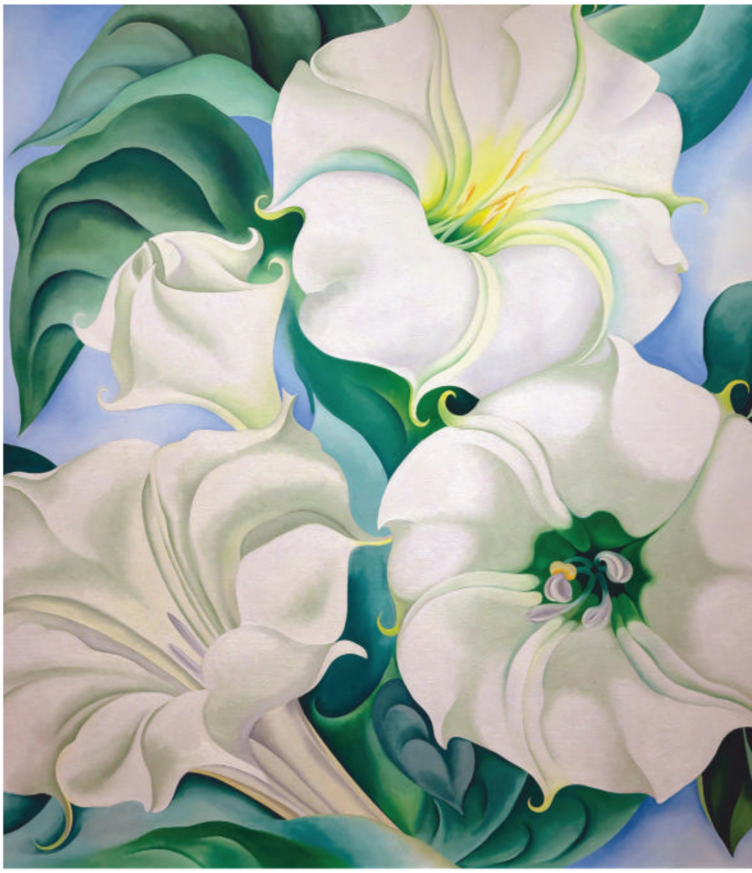
The courtyard where Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera entertained featured a collection of early Mexican sculpture, but you don't need to be an artist to use art in the garden. The web is packed with DIY outdoor art projects, and landscape designers suggest that art can be used to elevate any garden space.

1. **Art draws the eye,** creating a long view that leads visitors on a journey of exploration.
2. **Repeated colors and shapes build rhythm.** Gazing balls and sculptures that echo colors and shapes of plants contribute to a harmonious whole.
3. **Art can inject the gardener's personality or create a theme.** A collector of antique tools scatters examples through the garden. A children's garden might be filled with bug sculptures and paintings. A meditative garden might hold an abstract sculpture that invites contemplation.
4. **Art creates moments of surprise**—a topiary child peeking around a corner or an ornate mirror hanging in a nook.

Georgia O'Keeffe's Garden at Abiquiú

The gardens that American artist Georgia O'Keeffe kept at her home in Abiquiú in northern New Mexico are as different from Monet's gardens as they possibly could be. The adobe-walled Abiquiú garden fits perfectly into the austere local landscape. An organic gardener before organic gardening was cool, O'Keeffe grew the plants that she wanted to cook with, using kitchen skills learned on her parents' Wisconsin farm. The vegetables and herbs grown at Abiquiú would sustain her and her many guests, both at Abiquiú and her other property, Ghost Ranch.

The Abiquiú house was on the road that O'Keeffe traveled to reach Ghost Ranch, and she tried for years to buy it even though it was in ruins. The artist loved the fact that the village of Abiquiú was irrigated by an ancient acequía, or earthen canal, and the walled garden charmed her. Once O'Keeffe was finally able to buy the property, a friend named Maria Chabot managed the restoration of the house, studio and garden while the artist herself was in New York settling her deceased husband's estate. Today, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe manages both Abiquiú and Ghost Ranch.



Jimson Weed 1936

Robert Dash's Madoo in Sagaponack, New York

The two-acre plot in Sagaponack became the property of artist and writer Robert Dash in 1967. "It winked at me," Dash said of the place. He called it Madoo, a name that means "my dove" in old Scottish. He would work on Madoo for the next 46 years.

In the beginning, Dash wanted a meadow where he could sit and take in the views, but over time, his thinking changed. In Dash's world, change was a constant, as were experimentation and discovery. He became friends with English garden designer Rosemary Verey and by the 1980s had added "gardener" to his list of accomplishments.

Madoo reveals itself in a series of small gardens that tempt visitors to explore and discover. Pathways lead through bright roses into shadowed understory and out again into the sunshine. In a dreamy, Asian-inspired garden, the purple lines of a painted gazebo hint at the artist's ideas about color and surprise. Openings in the garden beds offer glimpses of surrounding farmland and hay fields. Today, the Madoo Conservancy manages the gardens and historic structures.

Bringing Water into the Garden

No sound is more therapeutic than the splash of a fountain or the *plunk* of a turtle dipping into a pond. Ponds, fountains and rills add charm to landscaped spaces, occupy difficult-to-utilize spots in the garden and expand the ways in which children and adults experience nature.

Ponds

If a pond is on your list of garden fantasies, you're not alone. Geometrically shaped ponds with straight edges and few plants please gardeners with a taste for minimalism. In more natural landscapes, waterfalls spill into ponds surrounded by billowing grass and populated with fish. On the edge of a deck for easy viewing or tucked away in a still corner of the garden, ponds and the wildlife they draw provide owners with many hours of pleasure.

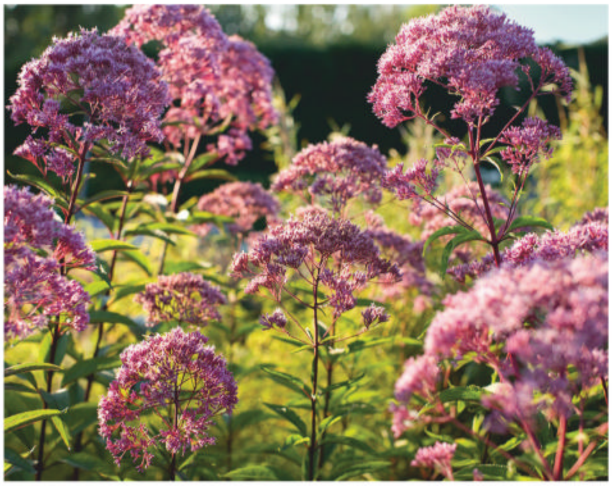
Besides being fun to watch, fish help keep things clean by eating algae that accumulates. A pond with fish must be deep enough to cool them in the heat of summer and warm them in winter—that could be a couple of feet or deeper, depending on the climate. Wildlife ponds lined with tall plants provide habitat and offer fish places to hide from the sun and predators. On the other hand, if you use plants with mounding habits around the edges, it will make it easier to view wildlife.

PONDS FOR ALL SEASONS

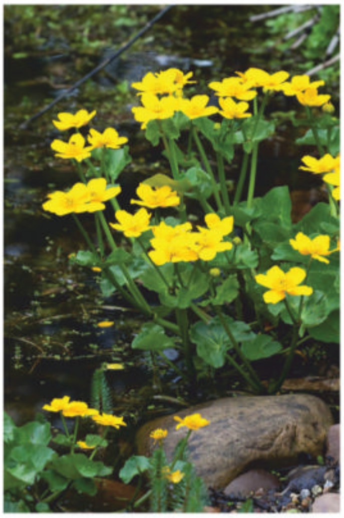
In most parts of the United States, ponds need to be winterized as temperatures drop. Tropical plants may have to be removed and composted; hardy pond plants may need to be cut back. Filters and pumps need to be cleaned out before freezing weather sets in, and fish need to be taken care of, too. That might involve installing a pond heater or an oxygenating pump. The pump will come in handy in late summer, too, when the water is warm and fish become more active, which means that they need more oxygen.

Plants That Like Having "Wet Feet"

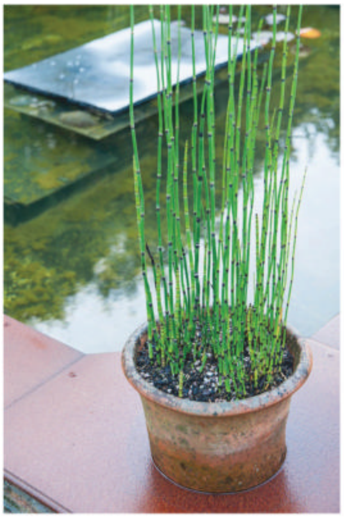
A mix of plant types keeps the backyard pond healthy and looking fabulous. Some plants have roots in the water and foliage above; others grow completely submerged. Some grow along the margins of the pond, and some have adapted to living in wet ground near the water. Some grow in pots sunk in the deepest areas of the pond. Selecting plants for a healthy pond takes some background knowledge—if you haven't done it before, consulting with an expert will make decisions easier.



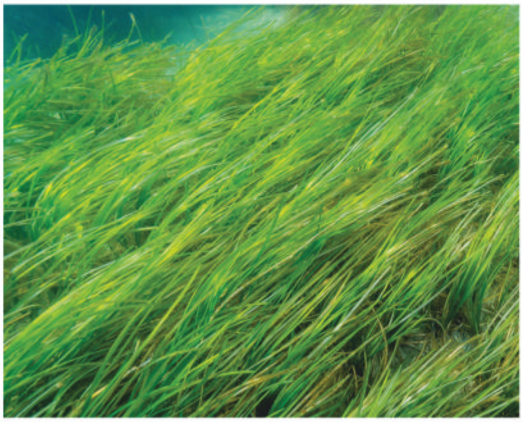
Eutrochium maculaturm, or **joe-pye weed**, is a marginal plant with lightly scented pink blooms in late summer to autumn. It is attractive to butterflies and edible for humans.



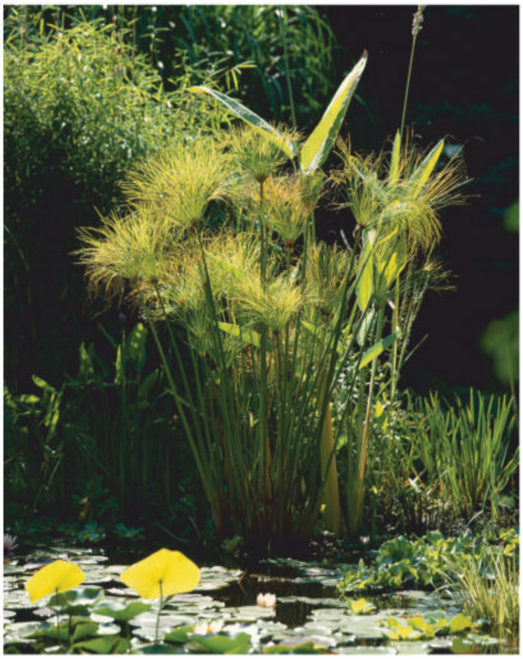
Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) is a marginal wildflower that blooms yellow in spring. It will grow in sun or part shade, reaching about a foot in height.



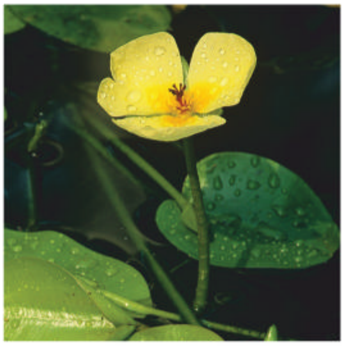
Horsetail rush (*Equisetum hyemale*) is a bog plant with long, straight stems. It's aggressive, so consider growing it in a container.



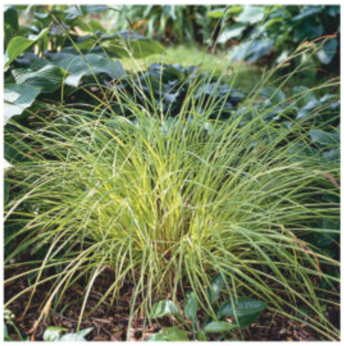
Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is a submerged plant that thrives in moving water. Sometimes it's called wild celery.



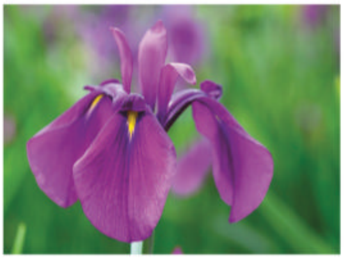
Papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*) is a warm-climate star that can reach eight feet tall. It will thrive alongside water, in a shallowly submerged container or in a bog.



Water poppies (*Hydrocleys nymphoides*) with yellow blossoms float on the pond's surface.



Many varieties of **sedge** grow in soft green mounds in bogs or alongside ponds. Sedges are grass-like in appearance and low-growing.



Large white, blue or purple blooms top the two-foot-tall spikes of **Japanese iris**. This plant is also known as *Iris ensata*.

Rills and Fountains

Narrow channels known as rills introduce the cooling influence of water in outdoor spaces. A rill is most often set into paving, but not always—sometimes, it's elevated for practical or aesthetic reasons. It may contain water-loving plants or it may not. It may be a few inches wide or a few feet, and it may stand alone or be part of a fountain.

Fountains are like fairy godmothers—they turn everyday spaces into one-of-a-kind sensations. No matter your garden style, there is a fountain to enhance it. For a contemporary edge, fountains connected to rills incorporate "sheets" of water. A dark tile or stone surround combined with austere plantings heightens the effect. If the garden leans more tropical—or formal—a tiered fountain might be the appropriate addition. This type requires plenty of space for admirers to stroll all the way around and admire it from every side.

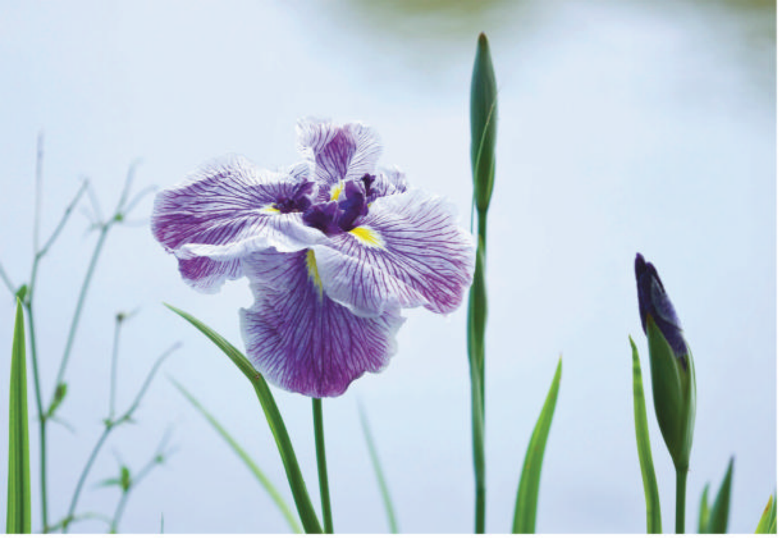
Tight spaces, on the hand, call for wall-mounted fountains. Looking for something to bring the hushed murmur of running water without dominating the space? Consider water bubbling out of the top of a pot and running down its sides into an "invisible" underground basin. Discreet or splendid, whimsical or serene, a fountain transforms a garden.

Finding a Place in the Garden for Water

In Renaissance Europe, magnificently engineered gravity-powered fountains hurled water to the heavens, but today's water features rely on electricity. Water features with pumps need to be near an electrical outlet with a ground fault circuit breaker (GFCI) and away from air conditioners and other noisemakers. The best locations receive both sunlight and shade every day. Siting a water feature beneath a tree can be problematic because falling leaves and branches can make a mess and clog plumbing.

Water can be the focus of the garden, a complement to the home's architecture or a hidden surprise. Citing wildlife viewing as the greatest reward of having a pond, many owners locate their ponds in quiet areas where animals won't be disturbed. Fountains and rills celebrate garden life, too, offering shelter and food to frogs, fish, turtles and birds, so place the water feature where you can see it.

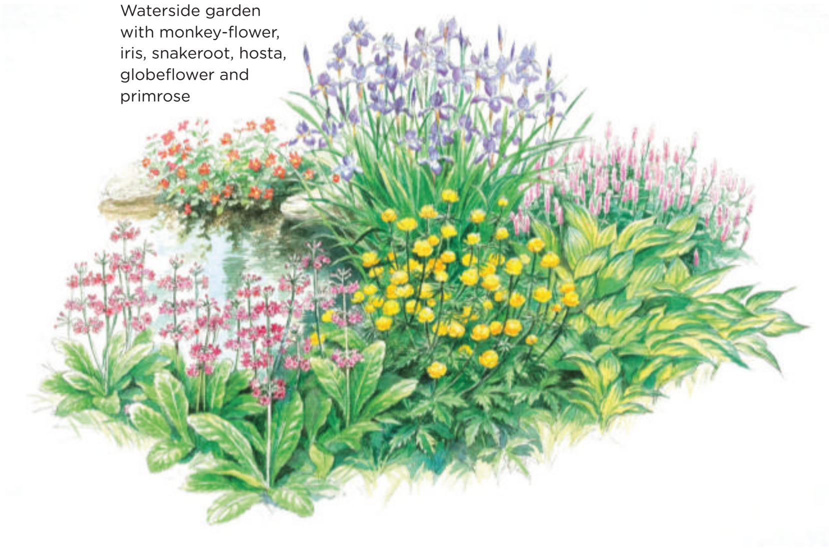
und
Harte



Water Iris: Goddess of the Pond

In a morning breeze, water iris blossoms hop and dance above the water like mythical nymphs. Many a down-to-earth gardener stops to sigh wistfully at the sight of them. Flowering freely from late spring until the onset of summer's heat (bloom season varies somewhat, depending on climate and variety), water irises joyfully announce that winter is truly gone and the growing season has arrived. Only true water irises, including the Louisiana irises, tolerate being submerged all the time, with the crown covered by water throughout the year.

Water irises are not choosy pond plants, though: most will grow either in shallow water or in consistently moist soil along the water's edge. They fall dormant in autumn, with foliage dying back to the crown, and reassert themselves when seasonal warmth and rhythms of light and dark tell them that winter is over. Dormant plants in pots or baskets in deeper parts of the pond might need to be relocated temporarily in spring to warm, shallow water at the pond's edge, in order to trigger new growth.



Waterside garden with monkey-flower, iris, snakeroot, hosta, globeflower and primrose

Water irises know their jobs in the ecosystem of a water garden and they do them well. Planted along the edges of a natural pond, their root systems inhibit soil erosion and their dense foliage shades smaller, more sun-tender plants. They also present a fairly solid mass along the water's edge, shielding pond fish from predators. Water irises help to filter pond water and remove metals and other toxins. Finally, the jewel-green, architectural blades create a fine background for other water-loving plants that have softer, more rounded shapes, such as Japanese primrose (*Primula japonica*).

Growing and Caring for Water Irises

- At least six hours of sunlight each day will help water irises remain healthy and flower beautifully. Morning light is preferable over more harsh afternoon sun.
- These are hungry plants; feed them in early spring and once a month through the growing season. About a month before the usual date of first frost, stop feeding.
- If they are planted alongside the pond in soil, keep it moist to wet at all times.
- Carefree water irises require minimal maintenance—regular deadheading and removing spent foliage.
- When blades die back in the fall, cut them down to about an inch above the crown.
- Divide water irises in pots or baskets every three to five years. The time to do this is late summer or fall, after they have finished flowering (note: in warm climates, some water irises may bloom in the fall).

Pollinator-Friendly Outdoor Spaces

Have you noticed on road trips that your windshield doesn't end up splattered with bugs the way it once did? Many experts believe that insects are in decline. Bee populations are decreasing not only in the United States, but all over the world.

Another highly visible example, monarch butterflies, have declined in the eastern United States by a whopping 80 percent since the 1990s, and monarchs in the west are approaching extinction levels. Worldwide, the problem appears to be worsening, but gardeners can help by creating pollinator-friendly outdoor spaces.

Planting for Pollinators

Pollinator-friendly gardens showcase a wide assortment of flowering plants, especially single-petaled bloomers, since double-petaled flowers are harder for creatures to access. Diverse planting is important because different pollinators need different plants for food, reproduction and habitat. Installing groups of each plant makes it easier for pollinators to find the ones they need.

Just as important as variety is the use of plants that are native to the area. Native plants make life easier on the gardener because they are adapted to live in the local soil and climate. They also meet the needs of pollinators in the region. There's no point in offering plants that appeal to pollinators that will never visit your garden.

Butterflies need host plants—that is, plants that will become food for caterpillars. The plants themselves may not be very attractive after caterpillars have been munching on them, so they can go at the back of the beds.

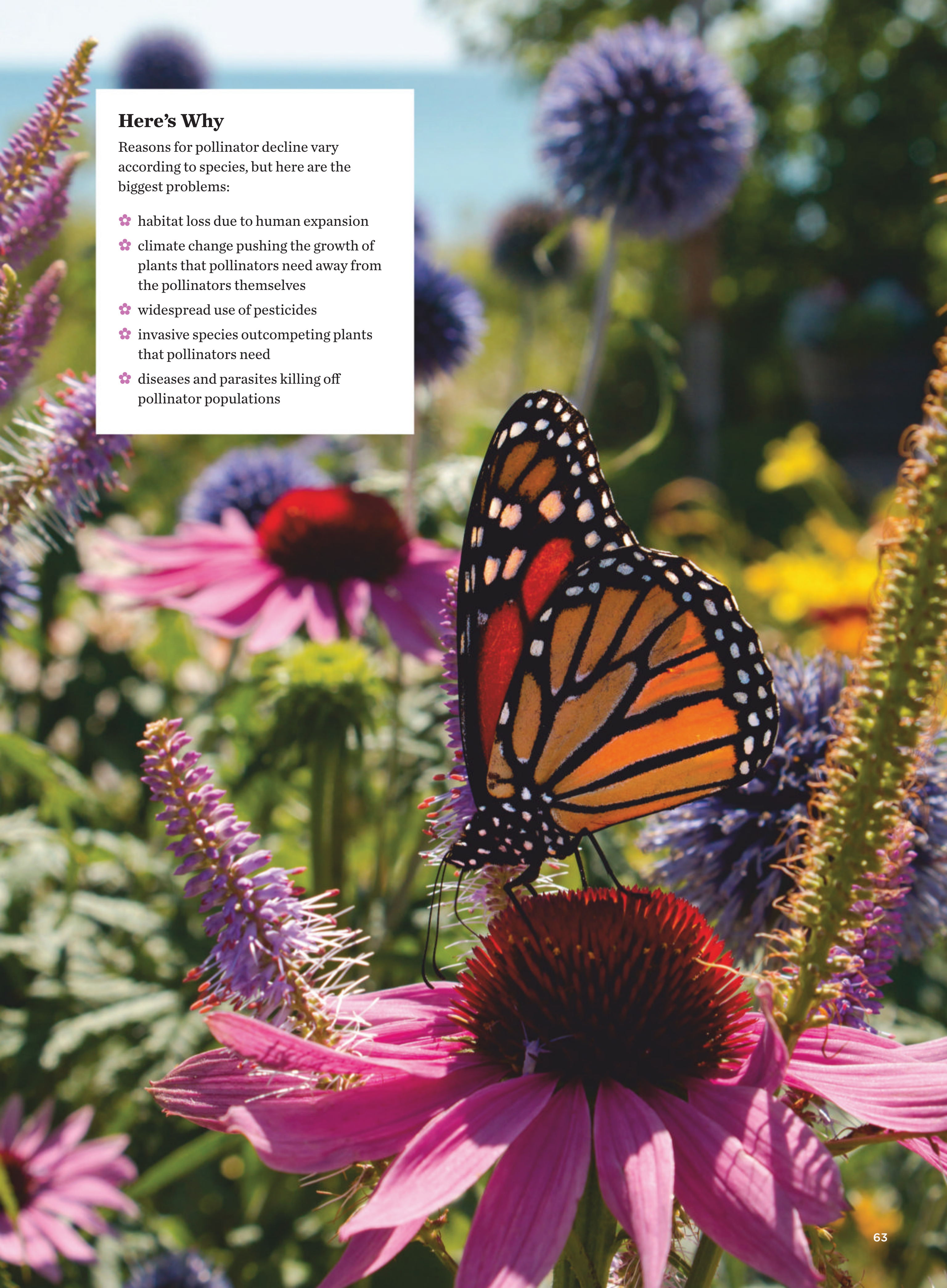
Any pollinator-friendly garden needs habitat. Bat boxes, trees and shrubs, insect lodges and dead branches all look like home to pollinators. Hummingbirds often nest in trees and shrubs too dense for predators, so a "mini-thicket" might lure Mama Bird into the garden. Fallen logs and bare patches of sandy soil entice native bees, solitary creatures that nest in such places.

Inorganic pesticides kill more than the pests you want to get rid of, including pollinators. If spraying is necessary, a homemade spray made up with liquid soap and water is one way to control aphids, mites, whiteflies and some other pests. Horticultural oils can also help—Neem Oil is a readymade product that is nontoxic to larger wildlife. Another pollinator-friendly way to control pests is to prune away infested foliage, bag it and put it in the trash.

Here's Why

Reasons for pollinator decline vary according to species, but here are the biggest problems:

- habitat loss due to human expansion
- climate change pushing the growth of plants that pollinators need away from the pollinators themselves
- widespread use of pesticides
- invasive species outcompeting plants that pollinators need
- diseases and parasites killing off pollinator populations



A hummingbird hawk moth or sphinx moth feeding on honeysuckle nectar

Beyond Bugs

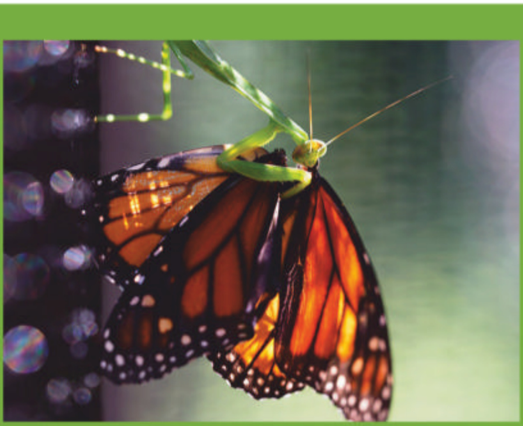
Not all pollinators are insects. Wind and water pollinate plants, and so do bats and birds, including hummingbirds. A feeder or two will invite hummers into the garden, where they'll visit your plants after sipping on artificial nectar. Some fruit trees, including mangoes and bananas, depend on bats for pollination. Plants that flower at night with pale, trumpet-shaped blossoms attract these nighttime pollinators. Candidates include night-blooming phlox, evening primrose and honeysuckle. The hummingbird feeders that you set out are attractive to bats, as well.

ARTIFICIAL NECTAR FOR HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS

To make artificial nectar, heat four parts water and stir in one part sugar (no honey, juices or artificial sweeteners). When the solution is cool, you can fill the feeder. Clean hummingbird feeders a couple of times a week with soap and water.

Pollinators Need More Than Plants

Does your garden have a muddy spot? You can take advantage of the problem area to give butterflies a salt lick. All you need is a bit of bare mud and a sprinkling of sea salt. Thirsty pollinators need clean water, too, and if the garden is not graced with a water feature, a birdbath will do. A mound of gravel in the basin makes it more easily accessible for butterflies and other insects.



Good Bug? Bad Bug?

Most folks know that bees, moths and butterflies are all pollinating insects, but what about flies, wasps and beetles? Some of the bugs that bug us most also pollinate our plants. At the same time, some bugs that we think of as beneficial can cause problems in pollinator-friendly gardens. Take, for example, the praying mantis. It's a favorite among gardeners because of its voracious appetite for other insects; it gobbles up aphids and grasshoppers all day long. Yet the very attribute that makes praying mantis so beloved makes it a villain in the pollinator-friendly garden because it also eats butterflies, moths and—well, you get the picture. And those pretty little dragonflies? They are not friends to butterflies, either.

The Dirt on Gardens in Urban Spaces

Urban living often means lack of outdoor space, but it doesn't mean you have to go without a garden. Limitations on space inspire amazing, fantastically imaginative gardening solutions. On rooftops, balconies and tiny strips of dirt between sidewalk and street, urban spaces are turning green.

Going Vertical on Rooftops and Balconies

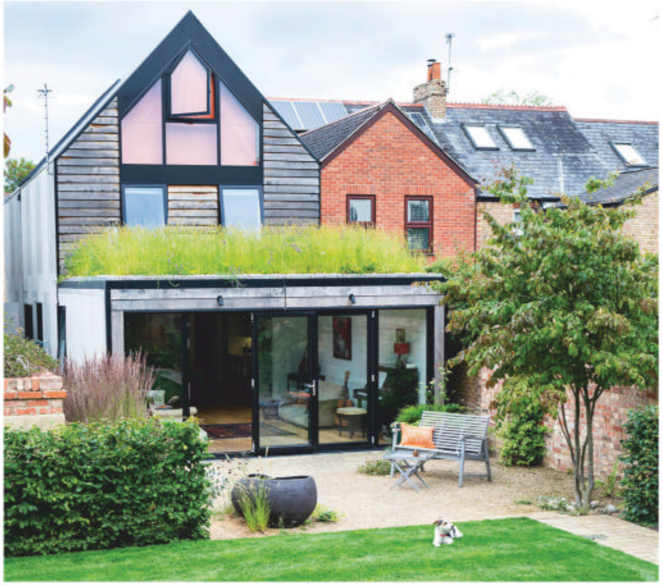
When you're searching for garden space in the city, don't forget to look up—and down! Trailing plants like tomatoes, ivies and pole beans grow well in containers and can be trained to climb up a trellis or over a balcony rail. Window boxes, wooden pallets, clay pots and even old tires evolve into enchanting plant containers.

Ingenious plant lovers come up with lots of options for bringing water to rooftops and balconies:

- a large watering can with a long nozzle
- an adaptor that allows connection of a coiled water hose to a kitchen faucet
- an automatic drip irrigation system connected to a water container such as a small rain barrel
- a rolling water container, which can be as simple as a mop bucket with a dipper or as specialized as a rolling tank with a spray nozzle

GROWING CONDITIONS IN HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS

Sun and wind can be intense on a balcony in the sky. Some plants tolerate buffeting breezes, but many will not. Thinking of a rooftop garden? Local authorities and property association rules can tell you whether it's allowed.



Green Roofs

A green roof on an urban structure is like icing on an oversized cupcake sprinkled with wildflowers—a special treat. Green, living roofs lower heating and cooling costs, filter pollutants and offer habitat to urban pollinators. Green roof pros describe two types: "extensive" and "intensive." A basic, or extensive, green roof may be a five-inch-deep layer of growing medium planted with succulents. An intensive green roof, on the other hand, has several feet of soil and diverse plants—including small trees—and outdoor living space for the homeowner.

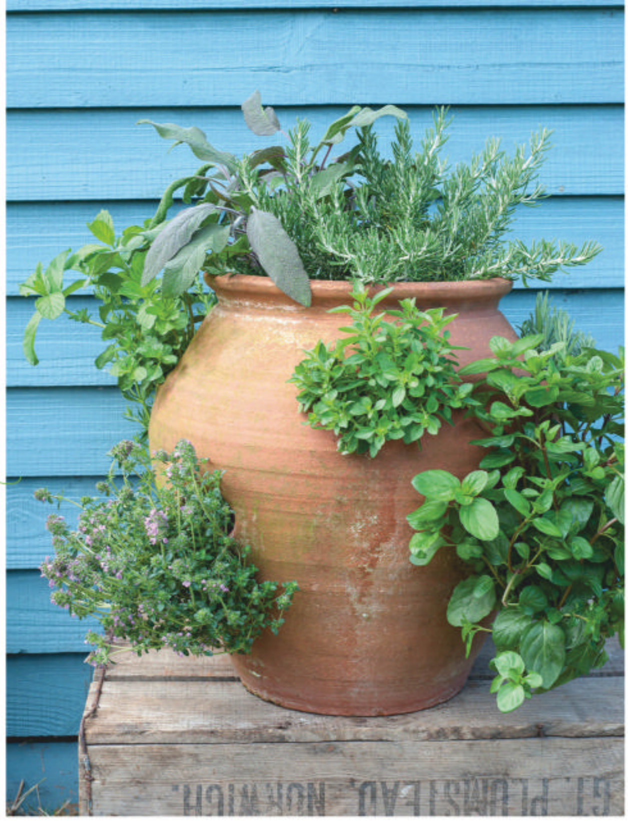
Pocket Prairies

Ready to swap that resource-greedy patch of grass for more natural greenery? You don't have to give up city conveniences to make the change. Eco-friendly city dwellers everywhere are turning their small city gardens into pocket prairies. A pocket prairie is a swatch of land planted entirely with native prairie plants and grasses. If enough of your neighbors follow your lead, the resulting biodiversity could noticeably change the quality of life in the 'hood.

To create a pocket prairie:

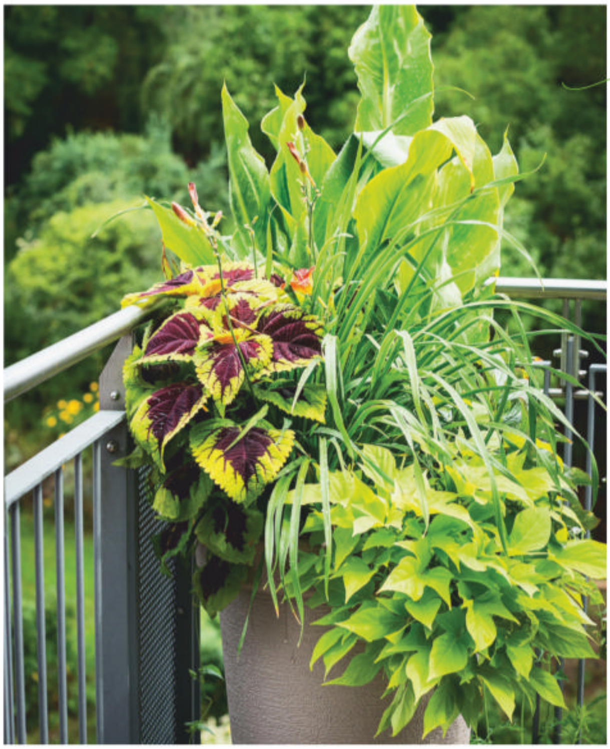
1. Contact a local extension office for a list of prairie plants and grasses native to the region. Then buy native seed from a reputable seller.
2. Lightly till the soil a few times to reduce weeds. You are not looking for perfection—native plants will crowd out a few weeds.
3. Plant native seeds in the appropriate season, either spring or fall. Most grasses will perform best if planted in spring.
4. Give the space time and water. Watch to see which plants thrive and which ones don't. It's okay to move things around in search of the best microclimates for individual plants.

Artful Containers



In the Hottest Summer Sun

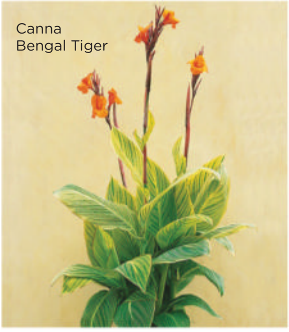
Nothing beats Mediterranean herbs for standing up to sizzling hot sun. Upright rosemary thrives in potted herb gardens, performing best in fairly large containers with regular watering (once thoroughly baked, rosemary plants don't recover well). Oregano, filling in the middle, sends out sprays of gray-green. Basil is another filler for sun, and chives add contrast in structure. For a silvery tone, substitute lavender for the upright rosemary and tuck in some silver santolina or culinary sage.

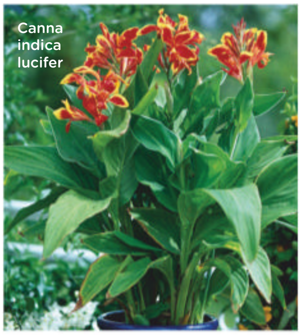


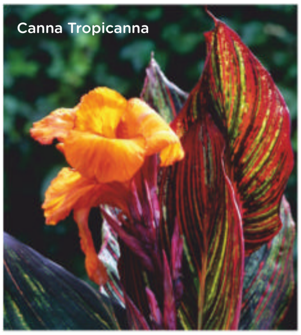
Mostly Sunny, with Afternoon Shade

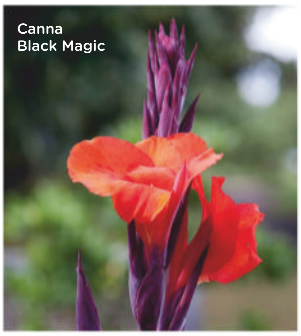
Even without blooms, canna thrills in this container, along with a sun-loving coleus, sweet potato vine and red nettle. Each type of coleus has its own preference for sun or shade, so choose with care. The sweet potato vine may wilt a bit on the hottest days, but recovers nicely as temperatures cool.

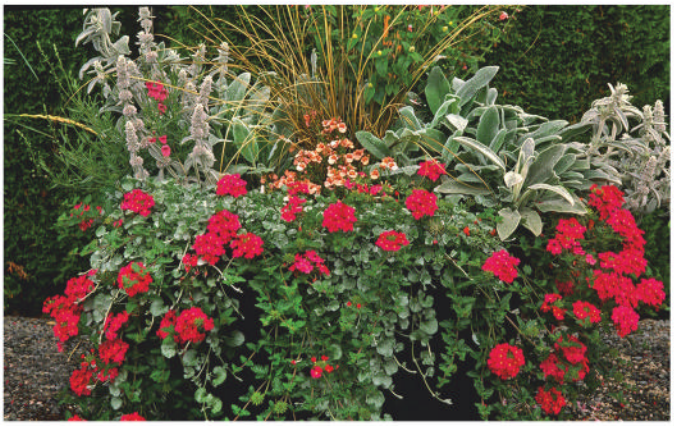
Cannas are wonderful in containers for sun, part sun and partial shade. They blaze in yellow, red, pink, coral and orange from spring through fall, and their foliage is green, variegated or even rich bronze to maroon. Some cannas reach heights of six feet or more, while dwarf varieties tend to top out around three feet. These thirsty plants need lots of water.


Canna Bengal Tiger

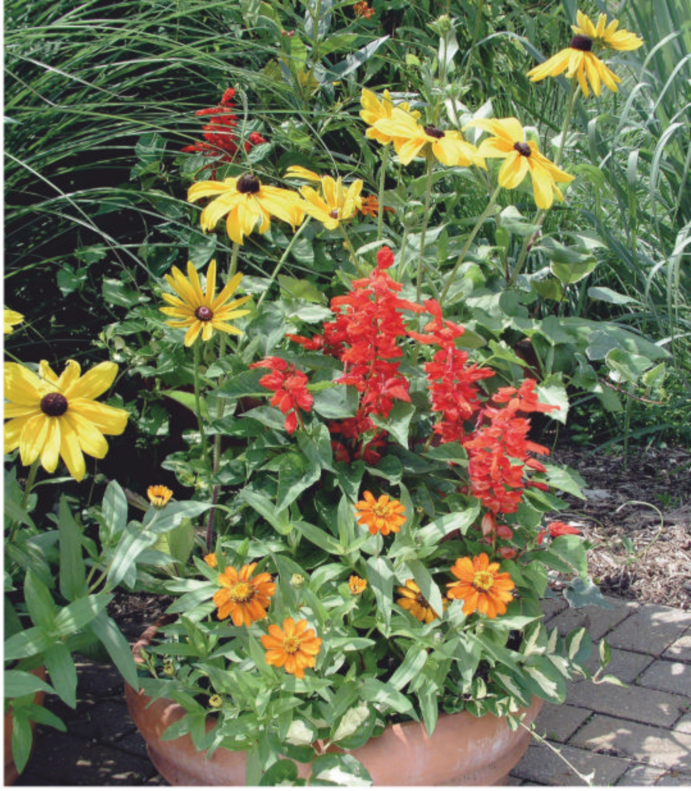

Canna indica lucifer


Canna Tropicanna

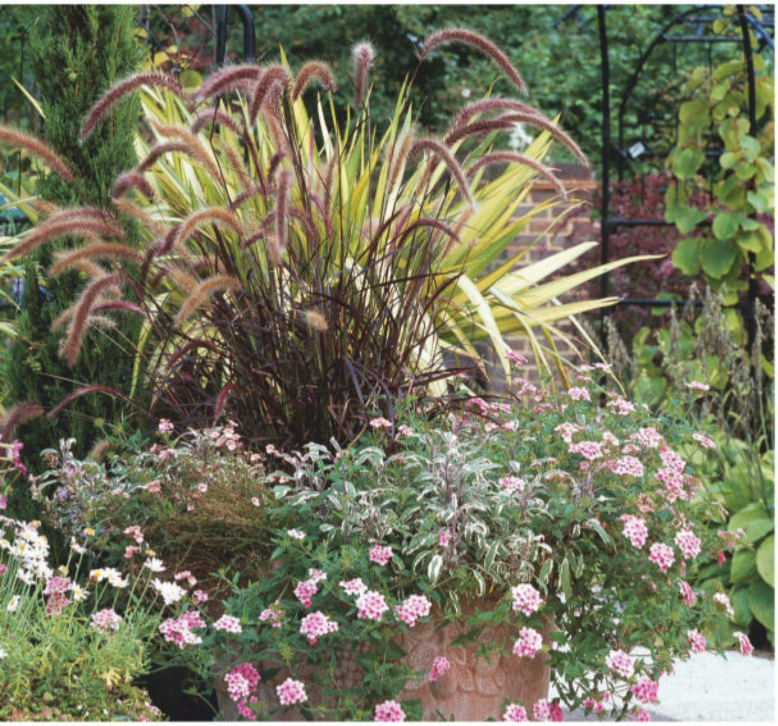

Canna Black Magic



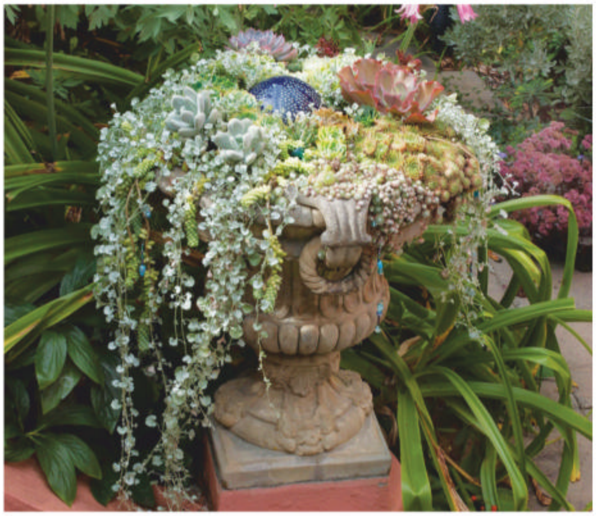
Carex, trailing red verbena, lamb's ear, silver ponyfoot, peachy calibrachoa and ivy sing together in this container, placed for sunny mornings and light shade in the afternoon. The sun will dry out the soil fairly quickly, so check often to see that it doesn't get too dry. If it does, the calibrachoa and lamb's ear will let you know by wilting.



Red salvia brings the heat to a container of rudbeckia and zinnias. In this combination, rudbeckia towers over the salvia, while zinnia fills in below. In an urn or tall container, plants that spill, such as silver ponyfoot, will soften the look. A clump of blue fescue accentuates silvery undertones. These plants, too, tolerate heat and drought well.

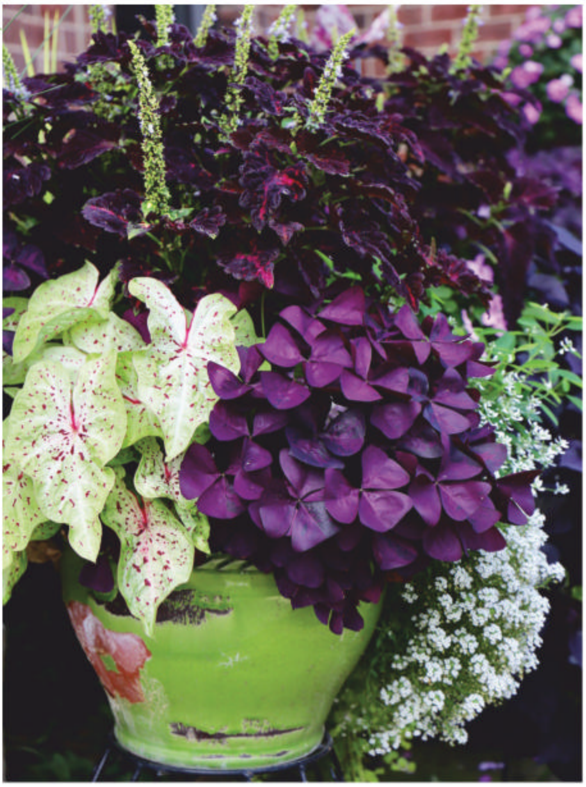


Mixed varieties of salvia and verbena create frothy displays for containers that receive six hours of sun each day. Trailing varieties of verbena spill over the lip of the pot. These plants are fairly drought-tolerant; how much water they need will hinge on how much time they spend in direct sunlight. An ornamental grass such as purple fountain grass will add drama and height.

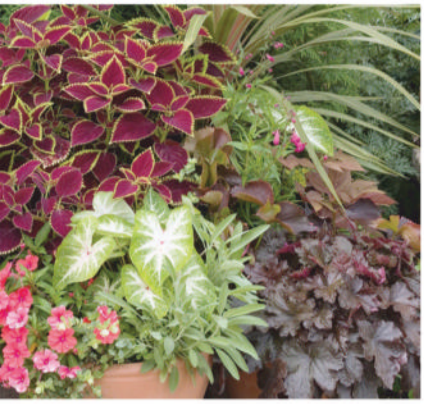


Silver ponyfoot is a versatile spiller for sun, part sun or partial shade. It complements the assortment of succulent plants in this urn, which can be kept a bit on the dry side. The succulents might burn in full sun, so this container will perform best if it sits in bright shade for the hottest part of the day.

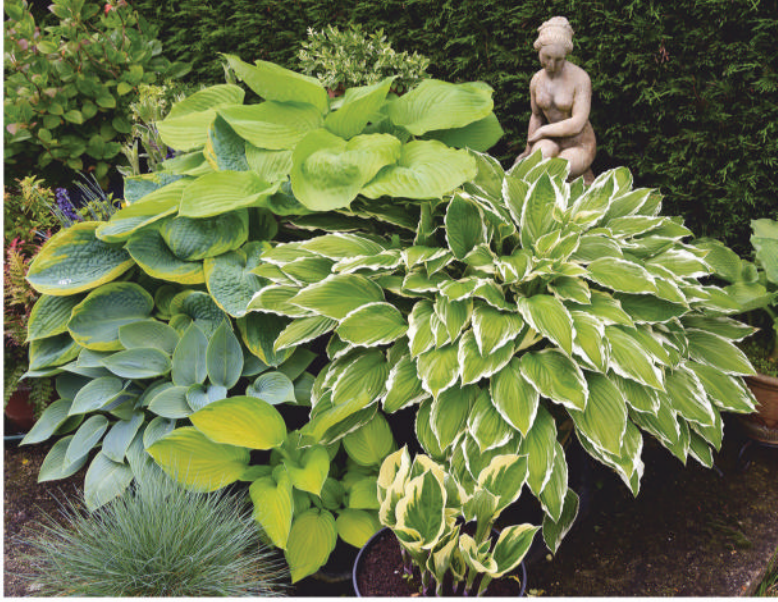
In Shade to Partial Shade



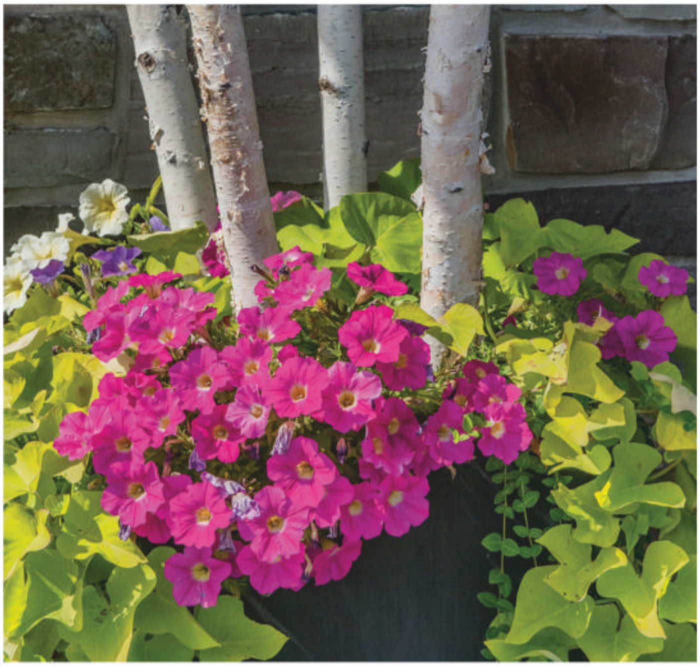
Frilly and traditional, caladiums rise above the rest, almost glowing in pink, white and bright spring green. To fill in the middle, try white browallia, wishbone flower or impatiens. For that matter, caladiums and impatiens of almost any color are a fail-proof combination for shade. Sweet alyssum or creeping Jenny "Aurea" can trail over the edge in brilliant green to gold. Water this container often.



For a hot color scheme, start with any of the tall and coppery shade-loving varieties of coleus. Bulk up the middle with orange or peachy begonia, and let warm-toned calibrachoa spill over the side. Yellow wishbone flower can sub for calibrachoa if it's unavailable. For a looser look, tuck in a shrimp plant. Water it well and let it shine in a shady garden.



In container gardens for partial shade, hostas have a way of stealing the show with their flamboyant foliage, but sculpted boxwood stands up for itself. Spiky blades of blue festuca—an extremely versatile grass—contrast nicely with variegated English ivy and white petunias.



Dazzling party-pink flowers and chartreuse foliage brighten a container in partial shade. Impatiens or petunias can provide the pink, accented by startlingly green foliage of "Margarita" sweet potato vine. Fuchsias will intensify the pink experience, and creeping Jenny "Aurea" pumps up the neon green. A pot in a dark color will ground the brilliant display and give it some depth.

In Deeper Shade

Dusty miller brings silvery light to a container in deep shade. Other plants for a silvery-white container in the shade include "Jack Frost" Siberian bugloss, hosta and silver ponyfoot. Arching white caladiums bring airy charm to any shady container.

Dwarf hydrangeas in a terracotta pot mixed with the glossy foliage of a shade-loving ivy. How well the hydrangea will do in the shade depends on latitude. In the north, it will require a bit more sun than it will in the south. Maidenhair fern and a couple of rex begonias will be glorious spilling out from under the potted dwarf hydrangea.

Ferns are traditional favorites for shady outdoor spots. Alone or combined with other shade-loving plants, they bring to mind cool, woodsy hideouts. These plants combine well in containers with most ferns: heuchera, caladium, rex begonia and many types of ivy. Not all ferns are at their best in shady locations, though, and some prefer moist environments while others need to dry out between waterings, so choose carefully.

Plants that spend all winter indoors may profit from a shady vacation in the garden. Pile that ZZ plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*) into a large pot or urn with textural ferns, elephant ears and a tumble of sweet potato vine in any color. Drag the philodendron outdoors and tuck a few shade-loving coleus around the pot's edges. Or take the prayer plant out to dress up a Boston fern, and skirt the display with tendrils of pothos ivy or a variegated English ivy.

Let It Rain!

Rain is like a birthday morning; it's a surprise party, a box of candy forgotten at the back of the pantry, free water pouring from the sky, lavishing garden plants with nutrients like nitrates, potash and sulfur. What a banquet! Sometimes, it carries organic matter with it, another treat for plants. Rain is often slightly acidic, too, flushing accumulated alkalinity from soils. No wonder so many people want to catch rainwater and save it for later!

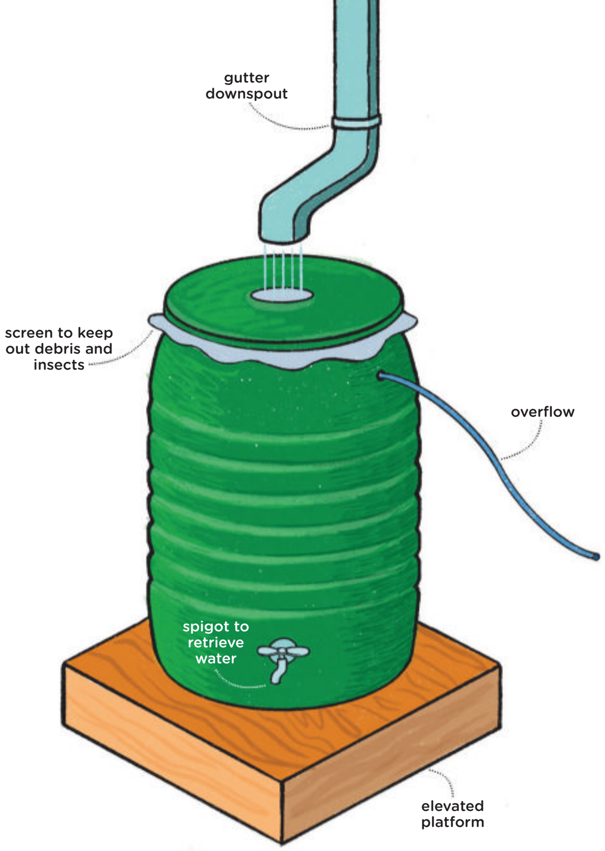
There's more than one way to put rainwater to use. Planning a garden that slows runoff so that plants can use more rainwater is called passive harvesting. Collecting the beautiful stuff in a barrel or tank so that it can be doled out later is known as active rainwater harvesting.

Passive Rainwater Harvesting

If you watch through a window on a rainy day, you may notice that water runs over your garden in streams. Passive rain harvesting involves using swales, berms and basins to guide that water and hold onto as much of it as your garden needs. A swale is a shallow channel with gently sloping sides, and it's usually used to slow runoff and move water from one place to another. Swales are sometimes planted with low-growing plants that take advantage of runoff and standing water. A berm is a planted mound or ridge and often a garden focal point. Circular berms built around trees help rain soak in around tree roots. Basins used in rainwater harvesting are filled with native plants that will appreciate an occasional flooding.

Active Rainwater Harvesting

Active systems tend to cost a little more at startup than passive ones because of the equipment required, but the flexibility of using the water when it's needed is a big plus. Active systems range from a small barrel linked to a downspout to large cisterns attached to gutters by underground pipes. Some are gravity-powered and some require pumps; all need filters, overflow valves and screens to keep out critters and debris. If you are thinking of collecting rainwater for houseplants, they'll appreciate it, and a small rain barrel will do the job. If your goal is to harvest rainwater to meet all the water needs of the household—everything from irrigation to flushing toilets to drinking water—there are systems to do that, too.



More Benefits Tanks can be attractive features in the garden, sided with cedar or stone, and they can serve purposes beyond containing water. A tank may offer shade, block wind and create temperate microclimates for nearby plantings. Harvesting rainwater helps neighbors, too, as it reduces flooding from runoff. It eases the burden on municipal water systems, whose water may be piped in from hundreds of miles away. Best of all, water that soaks into the ground and eventually finds its way into rivers is far cleaner than water that runs into waterways from parking lots and roads.

Plants Are the Best Housemates

Pets, kids, parents and spouses are all pretty great, but plants . . . well, they're wonderful. They're quiet, they don't finish off the cookies when your back is turned and they sustain us in all sorts of ways. All they ask in return is light, water, and something to grow in.

The Right Light

Bright, indirect sunlight is what most plants need—think of a north- or east-facing windowsill. Without sunlight, they won't flower or fruit. Normally cheerful green foliage may become yellow, leggy and sparse, and even the most stylish overhead fixture won't make much difference. Artificial lighting in homes is a little different from sunlight, and it provides the wrong wavelengths for plants. Fortunately, every home and garden center sells grow lights to solve the problem. The best grow lights mimic the light of the sun—most food plants (vegetables and herbs) need a minimum of six to eight hours of bright light per day.

STUDIES SHOW . . .

Indoor plants help people in myriad ways.

- Researchers have found that interaction with indoor plants reduces the effects of stress in the minds and bodies of young adults.
- Patients recovering from surgery have been shown to need less pain medication when plants—even pictures of plants—are part of their environment.
- At work, plants help people think more creatively and feel better about their jobs.
- Medical experts in the United Kingdom find that horticulture therapy has long-term mental health benefits.

Soil or Fortified Water?

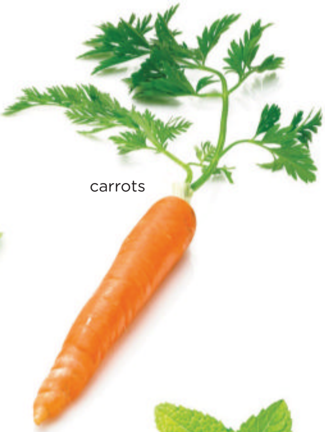
Indoors or out, most plants need a growing medium to support roots and provide nutrition. Garden soil drains too fast for indoor use; potting soil is a better choice. For starting seeds indoors, look for specialized mixes that are fluffy enough to drain but still retain water.

Hydroponics is one option for indoor kitchen gardens, and kits are available that include almost everything you need. Water that the gardener fortifies with specialty fertilizers nourishes plants at the roots. Systems vary quite a bit in cost and complexity, but you can start with one plant wicking up water from a reservoir. With enough space, light and physical supports, even large plants like tomatoes and beans thrive in hydroponic gardens.

Food Plants for Indoor Gardens

Beginning indoor food gardens often start with salad greens, because these plants grow fast and are easily maintained. Basil is another favorite; it's beautiful, it's simple to grow and it has a fresh, sweet fragrance. Here are some other food plants known to flourish indoors:

salad greens



carrots

cilantro

spicy peppers

basil

mint

chives

parsley

chard

tomato

strawberries

beans

At Home with Houseplants

Philodendrons, peace lilies, ficus and orchids—tropical beauties—surround us like a rainforest, nurturing our mental health as we nurture them. There is something wholesome and comfortable about a home where nature has been invited in, where we can see, smell and touch living plants! Houseplants revive stale spaces, helping them breathe, and they can do more than that.

Designers use houseplants in the same ways that they use beautiful objects, to define spaces and add layers of style. A good-sized palm can fill and soften an empty corner at a cost much lower than furniture. As the star of a room, the same palm generates drama. "House trees" in front of a window establish a bit of privacy, and layers of plants create more. A plant with an architectural shape or foliage can take a room from boring to interesting. Small plants bring cheer to stuffy bookshelves, warm up bathrooms and make offices more agreeable. An ivy trailing along the crown molding says the resident has a sense of humor. Hanging baskets define seating areas in the same way that table lamps do.

Caring for Houseplants

For a home full of healthy flora, group plants with like needs for water, fertilizer and light, but treat each as an individual. Water it only when it needs water, and use a moisture meter if you have one. Overwatering is one of the most common causes of houseplant casualties. Water and feed the soil, rather than the crown of the plant, to avoid rot and burning. Try to give each plant the amount of light that it needs.

Low Light

Every houseplant needs some light, but a few will tolerate fairly low-light conditions.

Many ferns perform well in low light, including **maidenhair** and bird's nest ferns.

Peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*) is sometimes known as a closet plant. It won't really survive in a dark closet, but it performs well in very low light.

Another low-light favorite is the **ZZ plant**.

Prayer plant (*Maranta leuconeura*) adds a dash of color to a low-light bookcase.

More Light

Most houseplants will perform well in bright, indirect light—the ones below need a bit more than some others.

Many palms, including the popular **areca palm** (*Dypsis lutescens*), grow to be tall, dramatic specimens with adequate light.

Most succulent plants, such as **aloe vera**, burro's tail and jade plant, grow best in bright, indirect light.

Not actually a palm, the **ponytail palm** is a succulent and has light requirements similar to other succulent plants.

Avocado trees are sometimes grown indoors in bright, sunny rooms.

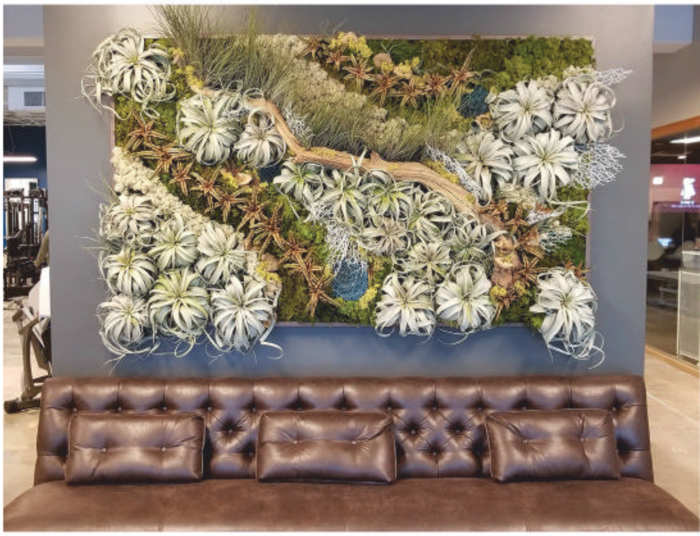
An Interview with Monique Capanelli

Monique Capanelli—designer and plant artist—discusses her twin passions, art and nature. At her Austin, Texas, gallery Articulture Designs, Capanelli curates a robust selection of unusual plants, her own designs executed by staff and unique product lines from other artists and manufacturers. Her 1,200-square-foot studio also creates large, custom residential and commercial installations in steel, wood and plants. "I paint with plants and sculpt with earth," she tells *Spring Gardening*.

Check out the website at www.articulture.com.

How would you describe your work?

MC: I am a designer and plant artist. My medium is Mother Nature. I am most known for my unique green walls and botanical artwork.



What is your background in plants and art—or is your talent purely instinctive?

MC: I would say that I have a naturally "green thumb," but my life is also a matter of preparation meeting opportunity. I grew up in a very artistic family who all love nature. So I was exposed at a young age to different mediums of art—jewelry, macramé, mosaics, music, painting.

How did you and Articulture get started? And where does your passion for plants come from?

MC: My family has always grown their own food in large gardens and had plants all over our houses. When I founded Articulture in 2009, it really was a perfect marriage of my two great passions and areas of expertise.

I've been glued to the page on your website titled "Interior Botanical" under "Our Work." The arrangements and specimen plants are remarkable. Is it difficult to locate great plants?

MC: I have been in the industry for 20 years and have relationships with growers all over the country. It is usually not difficult to source unique specimens.

It's obvious that you have a gift for this kind of work, and I'm sure you wouldn't do it if you didn't love it. Is it as much fun as it looks like it would be?

MC: Short answer—yes, I do love my job. It has been greatly satisfying to see my business grow from participating in small art shows around central Texas and working in a 400-square-foot studio, to now a nationally known design firm. I have created a viable business out of my art form and still challenge myself today, but it is not always rainbows and unicorns. Honestly, it takes an unbelievable amount of hustle, business savvy and tenacity every time I come into the studio—especially the past two and a half years. I do like the work I do, but it takes sacrifice, makes me super tired and ticks me off sometimes.

For some of us, having plants in the house is extremely gratifying, but not everyone has the resources to bring designers in to help us make the most of our plants. Can you offer a few tips on using plants in interior design?

MC: Plants really do make people happy! One tip is, have fun in picking out your pots. And start with smaller sizes, like four- to six-inch-diameter pots with different heights. Those are easy sizes to pop a nursery plant into. It's instant gratification! Place your different pots on shelves and on coffee tables throughout the house and bathrooms. And our boutique is a wonderful spot for inspiration on any budget! Bringing nature inside, and in cost-effective ways, is something we are passionate about. We offer a wide range of sizes and easy-to-care-for plants.

Are there certain plants that you prefer to use in your designs?

MC: *Pachira aquatica* is a really cool show plant with easy care needs. Philodendron "Birkin" is a good plant for a novice to start with; this is a tough plant. It can take being overly dry and can bounce back with a good watering. Schefflera is great for interiors and is drought-tolerant. Your readers should try to source a unique tree shape or a variegated variety!

Is there anything else that you would like to tell readers?

MC: I would just like to say to plant lovers, black or green thumbs, don't stop growing! Challenge your likes and interests and adopt a plant baby. We are always learning and evolving.

Phalaenopsis Moth orchid

Most Elegant Bloom

Splendid though they may be, orchids have a PR problem. Many plant lovers think of these stunners as prima donnas with special requirements that result in loads of maintenance. For a few orchid varieties, that reputation may be well earned, but, as a group, orchids are tough plants—some are even cold-hardy—and growing them is *positively addictive*.

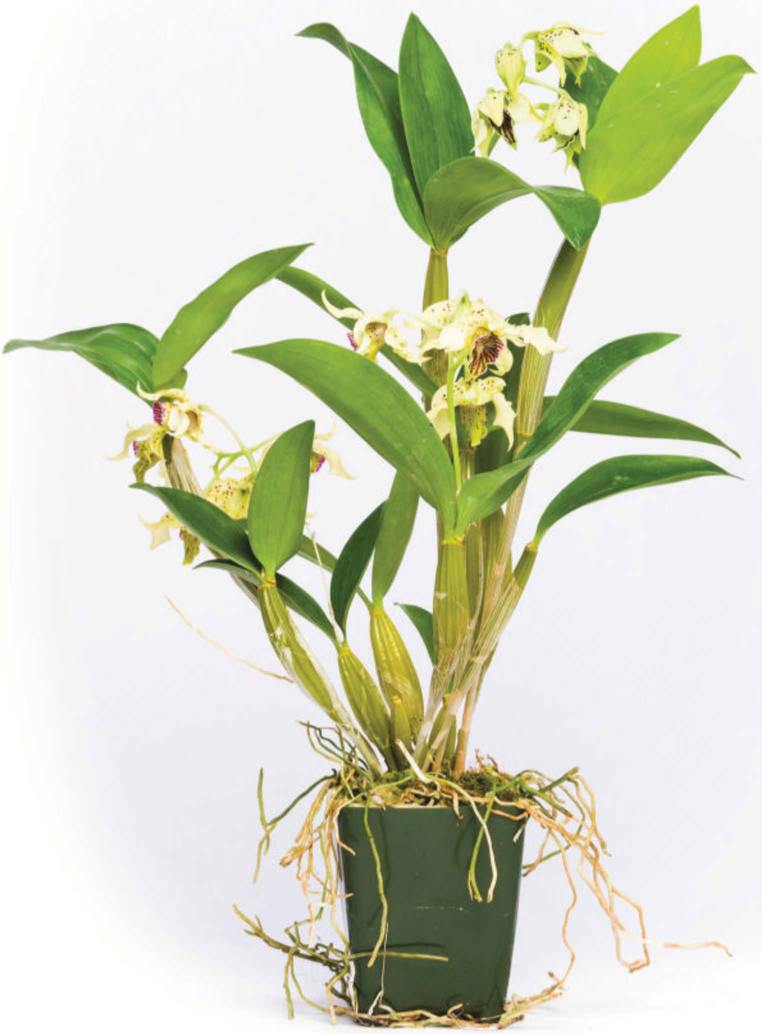
Phalaenopsis

The orchid most people know—the one blooming away on the receptionist's desk at the doctor's office—is phalaenopsis, and there are reasons why it's so popular.

Sturdy and adaptable, it tenders large blossoms on long, graceful stems. The word *phalaenopsis* comes from ancient Greek and means "moth-like." No comparison could be more apt. Phalaenopsis flowers hover over and around the plant's glossy foliage in shades of white, pink, yellow, gold, brown, red and green, sometimes lasting for months.

Phalaenopsis grows best in somewhat humid conditions at temperatures between 58 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. The broad leaves will burn in direct sunlight; bright, indirect light is best for this orchid. When its potting medium is fairly dry, water it thoroughly over a sink, and then gently shake excess water off the leaves.

Dendrobium heterocarpum



Dendrobium atroviolaceum x 'Pygmy' hodkinsonii

Dendrobium

With nearly 2,000 species, dendrobium is a huge family of orchids. This is the orchid that appears most often in cut flower arrangements, as it blooms easily and often and the flowers last and last. The type of dendrobium usually seen in garden centers and florists' shops is phalaenopsis-type dendrobium, so named because the flowers look a little like the blooms of phalaenopsis.

Like phalaenopsis, dendrobium is a tough little dude. It prefers stable temperatures and humidity, but will need more light to bloom than phalaenopsis. Put this plant in a bright, south-facing window. Dendrobium roots like cramped quarters, so it's usually sold in a pot that looks too small. Don't be in a hurry to repot—if the incongruency bothers you, hide the little pot inside a larger one. Water dendrobium every three to five days when it's growing and once a week when it's dormant. Gently shake off excess water that may be caught on the foliage.

TIPS FOR GETTING ORCHIDS TO REBLOOM

Most orchids bloom and rest, bloom and rest, so don't toss yours away when the bloom fades. Here are some tips to help orchids rebloom.

When phalaenopsis blooms fade, a new leaf should appear. When this happens, move the plant to a cooler location until a new flower spike emerges. Then move it back to its usual spot.

- When the last bloom on phalaenopsis begins to fade, cut the flower spike back to a lower node. After a few weeks, a new flower spike may grow from below the cut.
- A dendrobium that doesn't rebloom may need more light.
- Sudden changes in environment (temperature, water, humidity) can cause the sheaths on cattleya buds to yellow. Use a sterile blade to cut away the yellowing sheath, exercising extreme care not to slice into the nascent bud within.
- Cymbidium flowers best when day and night temps vary by 25 to 30 degrees.

NO SOIL FOR CATTLEYA

Neither phalaenopsis, dendrobium nor cattleya grows in soil. In the wild, many of these plants grow high in the tree canopy. Orchid-specific potting media are available in box stores and garden centers.

Cattleya

Cattleya

Flamboyant cattleya is the orchid in corsages and printed on wallpapers. It is a product of Central and South America, with generously sized flowers in extravagant shades and combinations of shades: tangerine and berry red, brilliant oranges and yellows, purple, pink, white and many pastels. Cattleyas form “pseudobulbs” topped by one stiff, narrow leaf or two, depending on the species. Its blossoms appear at the ends of fairly long stems that emerge at the base of the leaf.

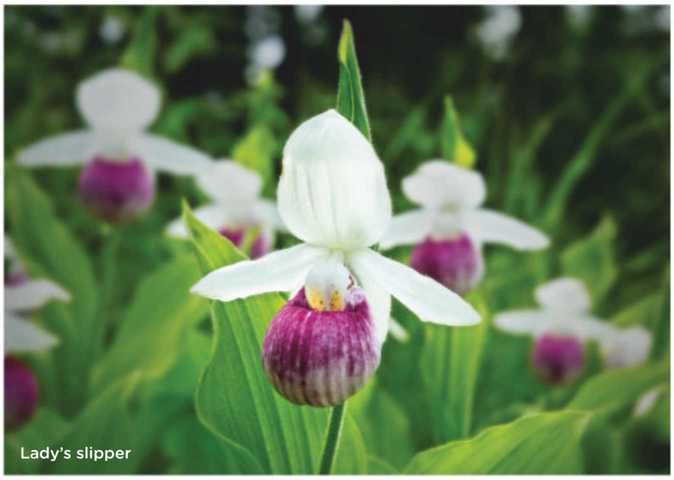
Cattleya enjoys warm temperatures, up to 85 degrees Fahrenheit, and fairly high humidity. It may benefit from a small fan placed nearby to keep air circulating. Give this orchid bright, indirect sunlight. House-grown cattleyas need quite a bit of water when they are actively growing, sometimes as often as twice a week. Cut back on watering when the plant is dormant, or not actively growing. When pseudobulbs start to shrivel, cattleya isn’t getting enough water.

Cymbidium

Cymbidium

These stately natives of Australia and Asia are often planted in the ground in temperate climates or grown outdoors in pots. Unlike phalaenopsis, dendrobium and cattleya, wild cymbidium grows in rich, loose soil. Species vary dramatically in size, but all are valued for long, strappy foliage and sprays of showy blossoms.

Cymbidium orchids tolerate wide variations in temperature, as low as 40 degrees Fahrenheit and as high as the middle 80s (even 90 degrees for some types). They are thirsty plants and need to be watered often. Outdoors, cymbidium will thrive in morning or dappled sunlight; indoors, it performs best in a bright room with indirect light.



Lady’s slipper

Native Terrestrial Orchids

Hundreds of delightful terrestrial orchids occur naturally in North American woodlands. They pop up in bogs and backyards, at the bases of trees and on rocky, shaded slopes, some tiny and some a bit larger, most with delicate, otherworldly flowers. Some of these beauties are rare, but others, like the well-known lady’s slipper, are available in garden centers and from orchid specialists.

For the most part, terrestrial orchids flourish in loose, acidic soil and dappled shade—they’re good candidates for planting in shady rock gardens, bogs, beds under trees, and for working into mossy pockets in retaining walls. Some are evergreen, and some disappear in winter only to spring up again after the last frost. Water needs vary from one species to the next.

Three Cheers for Technology

There was a time when folks who loved orchids had to maintain lists of growers to purchase quality plants. The most exquisite specimens were expensive and very hard to find. None of that is true anymore. Today’s growing technology means that glorious phalaenopsis orchids can be had for a bargain at local stores. All the varieties discussed here and more are available in nurseries. There has never been a better time to start collecting orchids!

Cutting Gardens

It's a dilemma faced by gardeners everywhere: should you snip a few of those fantastic dahlias to put in a vase or leave them to bloom away in the garden? This is why we love cutting gardens. Sited in a hidden corner, purpose-planted for supplying cut flowers, a cutting garden ensures that vases will be filled without unsightly gaps in the front yard flowerbeds. It doesn't have to be an elaborate affair. Starting small—one bed behind the house—gives the gardener a chance to figure out what works and what doesn't. If there is already a vegetable or herb garden, incorporating blocks or rows of flowers for cutting is a minor change.

The best cutting gardens

1. contain flowers that **complement** each other in color and shape
2. have plants with a **variety** of shapes and textures
3. make **efficient** use of space
4. keep maintenance to a **minimum**
5. produce flowers through at least **three seasons**

Plant Palettes and Textures

What colors make you happy? For your cutting garden, choose flowers and foliage in a palette that you love, along with others that are complementary. The most distinctive arrangements include variety in shape and texture: round dahlias, weeping silver ponyfoot, stalwart gladiolas or daisies, soft and blousy hydrangea.

Twenty-first-century trends give greater emphasis than ever to tropical flowers such as heliconia and textural ornamental grasses. Frosted Explosion (*Panicum elegans*) is the ideal combination of fluffy plumes and blades. Vining plants like clematis soften arrangements in a natural, untamed way. For exciting arrangements, think creatively when choosing plants, and always consider how the flowers will look in combination.

FORAGING FOR FILLERS No arrangement is complete without fillers, but gardeners don't have to make room for them in the cutting garden. Foraging for fillers is a time-honored tradition! In spring, newly budding branches, ferns and evergreen shrubs have lots to offer. Summer yields abundant grasses and tree branches. In fall, the natural tones of grasses and reeds pair well with changing foliage of Bradford pears and maples. Nothing can beat conifer foliage in winter—except gloriously green and umber magnolia leaves.

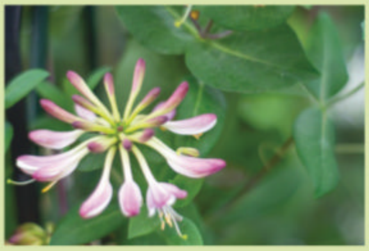
Planning and Plotting a Cutting Garden

With enough sun for favorite flowers and a water spigot nearby, the cutting garden thrives. Plans drawn out ahead of time on graph paper make it easier to figure the number of plants needed and where they should be placed. Some gardeners say that consolidating plantings, with less space between them than seed sellers recommend, allows for efficient use of space and helps to crowd out weeds. For easy harvest, make rows narrow enough so that you can reach in from either side; plant the tallest plants in the middle. And sequencing bloom times ensures an abundance of flowers throughout the seasons. Early spring bulbs are first to produce, followed by early-flowering annuals, followed by perennials and then a round of late-blooming annuals.

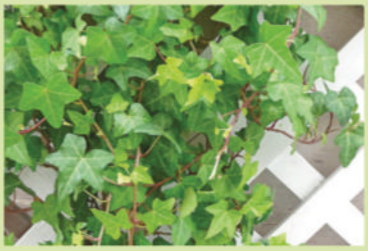
Vines and Tendrils

There's no denying the romantic appeal of vining foliage trailing over the lip of a vase. If space allows, trellised vines are a productive addition to any cutting garden.

honeysuckle

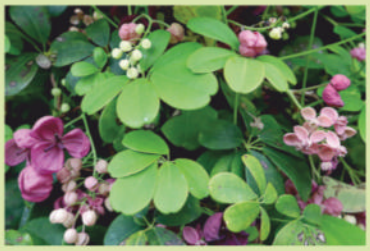


English ivy

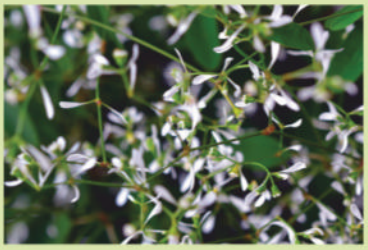


grape vine

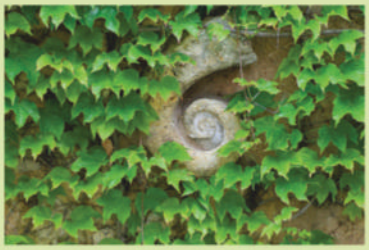
akebia



jasmine



Virginia creeper

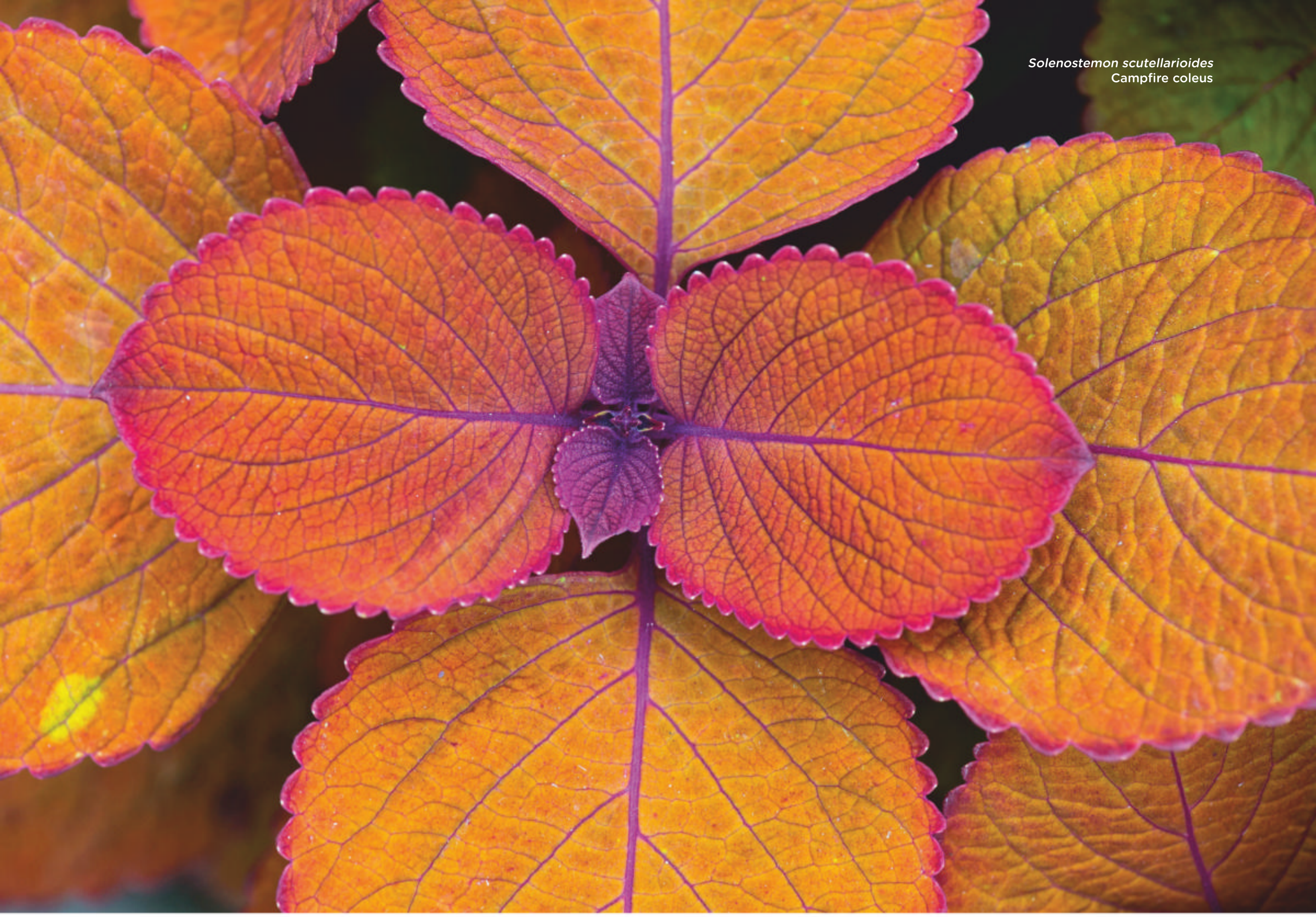


Maintenance

Taking care of the cutting garden is not much different from any other: watering the soil when needed, keeping an eye out for harmful bugs, pulling up weeds here and there. Harvesting flowers often and deadheading will keep the garden in bloom through summer and into fall. Besides encouraging plants to bloom again, cutting away spent blossoms will deter pests and disease. As summer ends, some flowers and seed heads may be interesting enough to leave in place for use in fall arrangements.

CUTTING FLOWERS FROM YOUR GARDEN

- Flowers cut in the morning will stay fresh longer than ones cut in afternoon heat.
- When a flower is cut, its stem immediately begins to seal, hindering absorption of water. If dropped into a bucket of water as soon as it is cut, that flower will last longer because it hasn't sealed itself.
- Cut stems with a sharp, clean tool at a 45-degree angle. The angle allows more surface area to absorb water.
- Cut them longer than you think they will need to be, so that you can recut to the correct length when the container is in front of you.
- Until you take your prized blossoms indoors, keep them out of the wind and direct sunlight.



Solenostemon scutellarioides
Campfire coleus

Many-Colored Coleus

Brown-thumbed plant-lovers, this one is for you—never was there ever an easier plant to keep healthy than fast-growing, eye-catching coleus. Native to Indonesia, coleus rocks the gardening world with velvety foliage in every shade from lipstick pink to lime green to coppery red. Dainty flower spikes do appear, but most gardeners pinch them away so the plant can devote all its energy to magnificent foliage.

Give Your Coleus Love

For the first week or two after planting, coleus needs the soil to be kept moist but not soggy. To help the plant fill out, pinch away new growth regularly. If it gets leggy, just cut it off a little below the desired height with a sharp pair of secateurs. This will encourage branching.

As easy as coleus is to grow, it does need to be protected from wind and passing foot traffic, because the square stems break off easily. Rich soil that drains well keeps this annual vigorous, along with an occasional feeding of liquid seaweed. Most coleus varieties flourish in shade or part shade, making them the perfect plant to bring color into shady spaces. In fact, too much sun can fade the colors in some types. On the other hand, there are coleus varieties for gardens with morning sun or bright, indirect light.

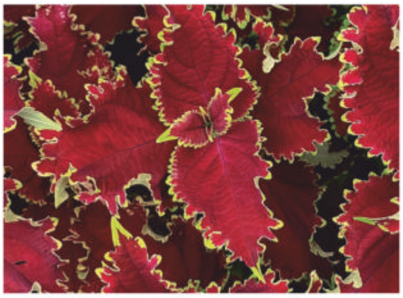
Taking Cuttings for Next Year

Frost-tender coleus will not last the winter in most climates, but grows readily from cuttings. When you fall in love with a variety, taking cuttings to overwinter ensures that you'll have the same fabulous plants the following year.

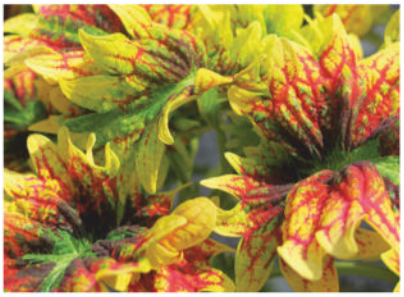
1. Cut at an angle just above a pair of leaves, taking **four to six inches of stem**. Gently but cleanly, cut away lower leaves.
2. Fill a jar with **clean water** and place several coleus stems in it, checking that no leaves are below the water line.
3. **Monitor** the water level for the next month as the cuttings develop roots. When water gets cloudy, replace it.
4. When you see **two inches of root,** pot each cutting separately in well-draining potting soil.

Coleus for Your Garden

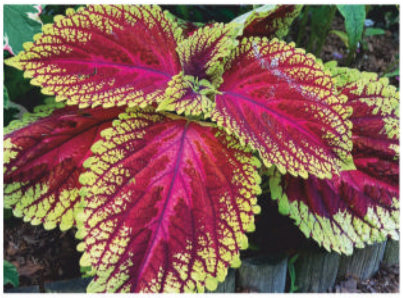
Tall, upright varieties are ideal for the back of a bed or as a "thriller" in containers. Midsize versions fill in blank spots in beds with reliable color, and trailing coleus shines at the front of a border or spilling over the lip of a pot. Here are some suggestions:



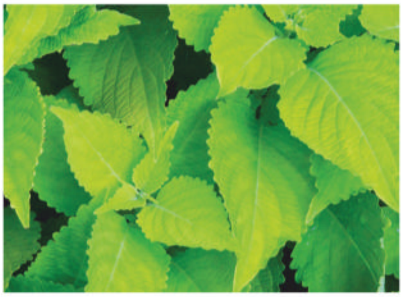
Vulcan is an upright coleus for partial shade. It has coppery leaves trimmed in a brilliant shade of green.



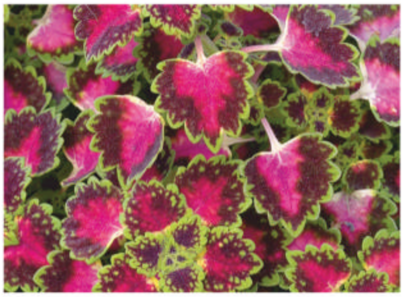
The yellow leaves of **Swallowtail** have burgundy veining and scalloped edges. It reaches about 24 inches in height in morning or partial sun.



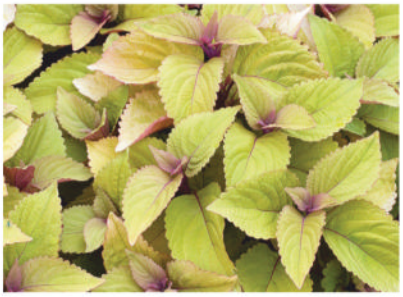
Trailing **Telltale Heart** has burgundy centers surrounded by chartreuse scalloped edges. This one will flourish in shade.



With ruffled foliage in chartreuse to lime, depending on light, **Amazon** will reach 24 inches in height, given partial to full sun.



Trailing **Strawberry Drop** is a showstopper in containers or hanging baskets. Leaves have very pink centers surrounded by dark red to maroon and edged in pale yellow-green. It needs partial shade in most climates.



The golden-green leaves of **Orange King** glow in morning sun. This plant may reach 30 inches in height and grows with a strong, upright habit.

Growing Brains and Bodies

Gardening is healthful for children in many ways, not least of which is that it's outdoor exercise. Besides engendering healthy bodies, all that pushing of wheelbarrows and dragging around water hoses promotes large motor skills and helps kids learn to focus on a task. Working in the garden with family members builds skills kids need for teamwork, including communication skills and responsibility. At the end of the day, gardening with kids yields far more than half-eaten strawberries—it contributes to healthy childhoods.

Gardening with Kids

It's always the right time of year to garden with kids. In spring, there's digging and planting and watering. Summer is for harvests and bug hunts, thinking about and comparing how plants grow, and learning about weeds. In fall, kids can help plan next year's garden, build scarecrows and cold frames, and prepare soil. Winter is the perfect time to learn about seeds, start tender seedlings indoors, "pot up" bigger seedlings, and wander through the garden just to see what's happening.

To Get Kids Started in the Garden:

- Involve them at the beginning. Take them on a tour of the growing space to think about sunlight and proximity to water. When planning beds, make sure each child gets a small bed of his or her own.
- Let small children dig through the dirt to find living things. Engage older kids with soil tests, discussions of how microbes work the soil and selection of plants that will grow well in their gardens.
- If raised beds will be part of the garden, older kids can help plan and build them. If the garden will be in containers, encourage them to think about drainage holes, sizes of containers and plants that will grow in confined spaces.
- When work begins, show kids how to use garden tools safely.
- Select fast-growing plants, especially for very young children; otherwise, they may lose interest before anything happens. Bush or pole beans, microgreens and strawberries are good choices for young gardeners.
- Bring home a handful of seed packets for the kids to choose from, based on what they like to eat. Walk them through reading the information on the backs of seed packets to learn what to plant where and when.

Garden Projects for Young Hands

A wildlife pond in a pot is an easy project that may yield hours of excited observation. Start with a good-sized container that is not too deep and has no drainage hole. Find a spot for it in light or dappled shade that is within reach of an electrical outlet. Add plants that grow well in ponds and on pond margins, along with an oxygenating pump to keep the water clean and clear. Fill the new pond with water and help children remember to top it up when needed. Then find them an observation spot where they can watch dragonflies, birds and frogs visit.

Propagating kitchen scraps is a resourceful way to get plants for the vegetable garden. With this project, kids get an up-close look at how plants root and grow. The base of a celery bunch will grow a new plant when set in a shallow container of water. Just place the container in a sunny window and keep the water clean and fresh. Root vegetables such as carrots and beets also root in water. Cut off the top half-inch of a carrot or beet, place it cut side down in a shallow container of water and wait for it to grow. It's fun to experiment with a variety of veggies to see which ones will root. When it's time, kids can transplant them into the outdoor garden.

Planting a terrarium helps kids understand how Earth's atmosphere lets sunlight through to keep the planet warm. Starting with a clean glass container (with a lid for moisture-loving plants; no lid for succulents and cacti), add a one-inch layer of gravel so water can drain from soil. Put down a half-inch layer of horticultural charcoal after that. Then add potting soil until the container is about half full. This is a good time to wipe off excess soil on the glass. Next, add small plants—it's easy to use a pencil to make holes and maneuver plants into position. Have children water the terrarium just a little and decorate if they like with tiny figurines, seashells or acorns. For humidity-loving plants, put the lid on; if water collects on the inside of the glass, take the lid off for a while to let moisture disperse.

Keeping a garden journal is a positive experience for gardeners of all ages. Encourage young children to draw pictures of their garden beds and press foliage and flowers from plants that grow in them. Older kids may want to write stories or poems, as well as recording what they planted where and when and what the results were. Some kids might get more out of creating a cell phone "album" of photos and captions that mark the garden's progress.

Building wildlife homes sparks young imaginations and may bring beneficial creatures to the garden. Some toads, for instance, can eat up to 1,000 insects in a day! To make a toad house, find a damp and shady spot outdoors and set a clay pot upside down on a bed of medium-sized gravel. Remove a few stones to make a "door" for toads to enter. Young school-age children might enjoy making a sign for the toad house out of craft sticks. Once the toad has a place to call home, kids may enjoy building a bird or bat house, an insect lodge or an owl house.

Putting together a themed garden is a fun way to get kids thinking about relationships between plants and people. A salad garden might contain lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, carrots and cucumbers. A pizza garden might be planted with onions, bell peppers, tomatoes, rosemary, basil, parsley and oregano. For a garden of fragrances, plant lavender, sage, sweet alyssum, geraniums and mint. How about gardening for hummingbirds? Plant catmint, honeysuckle, morning glories, cardinal vine, trumpet vine and salvia.

For more project ideas and helpful information about gardening with kids, visit the following websites:

https://gardenerspath.com/how-to/beginners/gardening-children/

https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/gardening-with-children/

https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/pandemic-gardening-kids-101

Plants & People

Much has been said about the benefits of gardening, from the practical results of growing fruits and vegetables to the purely aesthetic products of cutting gardens. Studies show that even low doses of physical activities like gardening have beneficial impacts on human health, just like working out at the gym and running in the park.

Plants heal, giving us reason to get up and move when we're feeling low. They keep our brains active and curious: learning when to plant artichoke, why the pothos ivy has been dropping leaves, whether moss might grow in that shady bare spot. These questions we can find answers to, and answering them brings peace. There are many, many questions in life that can't be answered, but these can.

Gardens grow humility. Nurturing tomato plants for weeks, shading them on the hottest days, admiring tiny blooms and anticipating plump fruits, only to wake up one morning and find that tomato blight has put an end to the lot of them—is there any experience more humbling? Some days, humility is the only crop the garden produces.

On other days, what we feel is wonder. When an orchid that has never bloomed offers up a blossom exploding with color—petals like the flesh of cantaloupe and a center the deepest cherry red—how can we not yip like excited puppies? Young leaves unfurling on a lettuce plant inspire a quieter response, but that's wonder, too. Let's hope that our children and our friends' children get to experience those feelings as they garden with their families.

Spring Gardening

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right: Springtime in Claude Monet's garden in Giverny, France.

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AS WINTER THAWS, people everywhere are dreaming about colorful blooms and aromatic herbs, shade-loving ferns, tomato plants soaking up the sunshine, and growing plans for pollinators. **Spring Gardening** has inspiration for gardeners everywhere, including urban spaces, community gardens, your back and side yards, and terraces full of pots. Learn about the history of famous artists' gardens and enjoy the imagery from some of the most well-known botanical gardens in the country. Pull on your boots and gloves! It's time to get to work . . . in the garden!